

1811/10/1

A
R E P L Y
TO THE
REASONINGS
OF
MR. GIBBONS, &c.

ERRATA.

Page 5, line 15, *for this, read that.*

12, — 9, *insert he.*

13, — 26, *for is, r. at.*

35, — 11, *for prodigious, r. excessive.*

71, — 17, *for happiness, r. welfare.*

— — 31, *for among them, r. there.*

75, — 20, *for Trojan, r. Trajan.*

R E A S O N I N G S

M. R. G I B B O N S

A
R E P L Y.

TO THE
R E A S O N I N G S

O F

M R. G I B B O N S,

I N H I S

H I S T O R Y o f t h e D E C L I N E a n d F A L L

O F T H E

R O M A N E M P I R E,

W H I C H S E E M T O A F F E C T

T H E T R U T H O F C H R I S T I A N I T Y;

B U T

Have not been noticed in the A N S W E R which
Dr. W A T S O N hath given to that Book.

By S M Y T H L O F T U S, M. A. V I C A R o f C O O L O C K.

Pass over the Isles of Chittim, and see; and send unto Kidor, and consider diligently, and see if there be such a Thing. Hath a Nation changed their Gods, which yet are no Gods? But my People have changed their Glory, for that which doth not profit.

D U B L I N :

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THE HISTORY OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE

THE TRUTH OF CHRISTIANITY
WHICH ALONE IS THE

Have been wounded in the new world
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It is the duty of every citizen to
the rights of the people of this country
this country which is the heart of the
Glorious for the world and for the

THE HISTORY OF THE
ROMAN EMPIRE

REPLY

TO THE REASONINGS

MR. GIBBONS, &c.

CHAPTER I.

MY firm belief of that religion which distinguishes its author and itself by a commandment to love one another, and consequently to promote to the utmost of our power, the happiness of all mankind, and more especially of all our fellow christians, hath induced me to attempt a defence of that religion against the attacks made upon it, by the more ingenious than candid Mr. Gibbons: who, in his History of the Decline of the Roman Empire, has endeavoured totally to destroy it, and to introduce I know not what, it is more than probable he himself knows not what, in the place of it; but this I cannot tell him he would introduce, such a profligacy of principle and manners as must totally disqualify the reader within whom he has any success, for any happiness either in this or the next world; and this, whether I considered as an individual or a member of society, the providence of God and the nature of man, both of them unite to bear me out in this assertion.

B

I LOOK upon it as a fortunate incident for Ireland, that Dr. Watson's answer came out here almost as soon as Mr. Gibbons's book ; for it confutes the most difficult and pernicious parts of it. But as this gentleman hath studied conciseness so much as to omit many things, which to the less knowing reader may want an explanation, and as his reply hath not been so generally propagated as the history itself, I have endeavoured to remedy both these defects: The first, by writing these observations, which will give a tolerable view of the whole controversy, and extend to these objections against christianity, which are the great foundations of our modern unbelief; and the second by having them printed in a small pamphlet, which may be easily bound up with Dr. Watson's book.

ONE should imagine that these deistical writers who all declare for a religion of nature, and this so perfect that nothing can be added to or diminished from it, and the whole of it likewise so certain and manifest that no instruction can be wanted or given in it even by God himself: One should imagine, that he would at least find these gentlemen confer some honour upon christianity, not only for teaching a much more perfect and beneficial morality, and enforcing it by infinitely more powerful motives than had ever been known by mankind before; but likewise for its furnishing us with a perfect knowledge of God, his laws, nature, government and true religion, and the pure worship with which he is to be served; which knowledge must be most advantageous to virtue and the happiness of mankind, and thereby save them from that abominable superstition of the heathens which must prove so pernicious to both. One should imagine that this absurd and idolatrous paganism should be as severely, as it would be most justly, condemned by these setters-up of natural religion, and christianity in the same manner approved of and commended by them. But nothing like this, nay the very reverse of this, is to be found in all our infidel writings.

THE great genius and learning of Mr. Gibbons, and his acquaintance with the heathen and primitive christian writers,

writers, must have informed him, that the grossest immorality was not only permitted but required by the Gentile religion. That their Gods, nay the very chief of them, were made up of the undutiful and incestuous, of the abusers of themselves with mankind, of the savage and murderer, of the thief and cheat. He cannot be ignorant that they confessedly worshipped evil beings to prevent their doing them mischief; that human sacrifices were universal among them; that they were practised even in their most civilized nations, and frequently offered up with an excess of cruelty and torture. He must know that many of their religious services did require drunkenness, lewdness, pollution, blood, murder, even to their burning to ashes their own living children, and sometimes in great numbers, of their most noble and best families, to their horrible and malicious idols and devils: For nothing but such accursed spirits could have inspired or been pleased with such a service as this.

WITH all these things must Mr. Gibbons be well acquainted, and must likewise know that all their wise philosophers were so ignorant or timorous in these matters, that they all outwardly conformed to the religions of their several countries, and advised all others to do the same. And when christianity arose, instead of abandoning this detestable superstition, did generally endeavour to defend it; and therefore, with equal falsehood and malice, did misrepresent christianity, and abuse it as the basest and most abominable of all false and bad religions. He cannot be, he is not ignorant of their absurd notions of a future life, and the retributions of it; but makes their very honest philosophers and the priests themselves deride the whole of their religious services whilst they officiated in them. What a charming religion of nature was this, and what worthy guides in it were their philosophers and great men, upon whose integrity Mr. Gibbons, in other places, can himself repose, and would have others likewise repose, such an unlimited confidence.

Thus abominably false was the pagan religion: And what a sad effect must this have had upon the morals of the people, when they were, even by their religion, initiated into wickedness; and must besides be naturally led to imitate the actions of these Gods whom they worshipped and thought it their duty to please? These were their Gods, and such their worship, whilst the one true God was totally abandoned by them; and yet Mr. Gibbons, page 40, of the Dublin edition, vol. I. instead of condemning, seems rather to praise this perversion of all religion. The folly and falsehood of it, are, indeed, acknowledged; but it's uncleanness, madness, violence, cruelty, are all kept out of sight; and this monstrous superstition treated by him, rather as an innocent and useful, than a most criminal and pernicious deceit; and an occasion taken to commend it for its mildness and toleration; although it would bear no religion but such as was founded upon its own bottom, nor sometimes all of this neither; and tho' it shewed itself so cruel and bloody to the best of mankind for professing christianity, and refusing to join in this their abominable idolatry.

CHAP. II.

HAVING, with the primitive christian apologists, concisely shewn what that heathenism was which Mr. Gibbons so undeservedly spares, or rather commends, let us with them turn to christianity, and see likewise what this religion is which he so unmeritedly condemns and is endeavouring to destroy.

CHRISTIANITY informs us that there is one infinite, eternal, all-powerful, omniscient Spirit, whom we call God; who, as he is absolutely perfect in his being, and the producer of all other beings, so likewise in morality or holiness: For he is infinitely pure, just, merciful, good, and true, and therefore the greatest lover possible of virtue, and hater of vices. It tells us that the Heavens and the Earth, and all things in them, were created, do

do subsist, and are governed by him. That he was too good to make man for this insignificant life alone, but hath formed him for an endless and perfect existence in a new life, and an everlasting and inconceivable glory and happiness in it; provided he will, by proper behaviour in this world, qualify or make himself capable of them. That the qualification required, is for him so to act in this present life as shall render him the most lovely and happy being in himself, most beneficial to every creature with whom he is connected, and to whom his influence can extend, and, as shall fill him with those affections which will assimilate him to the all perfect God, and train his heart to the enjoyment of that being in whom alone the perfect happiness of all intelligent creatures is to be found, and upon a likeness to whom it must for ever depend.

CHRISTIANITY tells us, that, weak fallen and sinful as all men are, and perfectly holy and just as their God, yet he is not man's enemy but his most affectionate and beneficent friend; for even to us sinners God is love; that he does not desert us as soon as he has made us, but watches continually over us to do us good, and this with such a particular providence, that a hair falls not from our heads but with his knowledge and by his permission. That we may in every case address ourselves to him in prayer, for protection, deliverance, guidance, blessing, and be sure of obtaining them all so far as they are good for us; provided we intreat them with fit dispositions, and in the proper manner which he hath prescribed to us: And from hence shews us, we have a certainty, that, with our own honest endeavours, he will carry us safe through all our dangers here, whether of life or death, and never quit our protection till he has lodged us for ever safe in Heaven and its inconceivable bliss. What glorious and happy privileges are these for men! But christianity tells us, that this is a blessed condition, to which we are not of ourselves entitled; but which has been most dearly purchased for us by our redemption in Christ.

FOR inasmuch as all men are sinners, and the great creator and governor of the universe is of such a nature as to hold all sinners in abhorrence, and he must likewise, as he values the happiness of his whole creation, dissuade by the most powerful motives possible from all sin, and persuade to virtue; therefore has the most perfectly just and holy, but most merciful and loving God, contrived a way to save man, which shall the best answer to both these purposes, at the same time that it procures pardon, favour, and happiness for man the sinner. For to save mankind from the destructive nature and horrible effect of sin, did that Son of God, who is himself the efficient and final cause and sustainer of all things, become man, with all the innocent weakness and infirmities of this low nature, that, by therein performing for us the whole will of God, without any sin, he might cloath us with his own righteousness; and, by dying in all the tortures of the cross for us, he might expiate our sins, and reconcile us to his all-holy father and our offended God. By all these providences have we the greatest detestation possible shewn to sin, and yet love to his creatures tho' sinners: And nothing could ever so affectingly prove the dreadfully odious and pernicious nature of vice, and the absolute necessity of virtue in order to our future happiness, as does this christian scheme of salvation. And to increase this conviction, we are not yet, with all this excess of kindness manifested to us, permitted to put up a petition to him but through the mediation of this infinitely deserving redeemer; nor are we capable of any acceptance from him, but through the sanctification of his all-powerful and holy spirit: who shall new create our fallen and corrupted nature, and thereby render us capable of that divine favour and happiness, for which we were at first created. And thus is the whole of our salvation from our God, who himself atones, sanctifies, pardons, blesses, and is all in all to the true christian. Besides, to give us an undoubted assurance of his having obtained all these blessings for us, he rises from the grave and conquers death, the penalty of sin, ascends into Heaven the place of our happiness, to take possession before-hand

hand for us; he is invested with all power, both in Heaven and Earth; he visibly sends down from hence the gifts of his holy spirit upon men; and because he loved us to such an inconceivable degree, therefore is he appointed the judge of all creatures, and he himself it is who is to award them all to their proper fate, whether of happiness or misery for ever; and our salvation put entirely into his power.

By these means have we the most certain and comfortable assurance of our being all saved upon the easy terms of the gospel, and made partakers of endless life and inconceivable happiness. And shall any man wilfully cast away these blessings from him? It is true that they are most wonderful; and where a wrong bias of mind hath been contracted, that they will appear hard of belief, or utterly incredible. But to take off this incredibility, let it be considered that God is an infinite being, and must therefore be exalted as much above men in his workings, as in his incomprehensible nature; and as every person acquainted with his material creation, must acknowledge, that he is here inscrutable where yet there can be no opposition made to his will, so must he be much more inscrutable in the formation and government of his moral creatures; who to be moral must be free, and therefore governed according to their freedom; but who, if they be free, will many of them, for present gratification, be ever flying off from that rule of right to which all happiness, is, and must be annexed, and thereby introducing evil instead of the creator's intended good, into his good creation. Where this happens to be the case, a remedy will be manifestly wanted; and certainly it is so in this our world: And we find that the divine power, wisdom, goodness, are greatly, I had almost said principally here displayed, by the very many and various remedies which he hath provided for the numberless evils which immorality and wickedness have introduced into our world, and to which we are here so miserably subjected.

BESIDES

BEYOND the divine Being must ever be distinguished and glorified by his workings, and chiefly, no doubt, by his workings to do good; and if so, it must be by providences of mercy and kindness which shall be expressive of his infinity, and therefore stupendous and wonderful beyond all created conception. And if it be considered, that a love to virtue and his creatures, must ever be the highest affections in the divine mind, and must, by the manifestations which he shall herein make of his nature, do the most honour to himself and benefit to all moral beings; (for this will beget in them the greatest love to, and happiness in him, and fill them with these affections which are of all others the most lovely and blissful) we shall then see abundant reason for this providence of christianity; and in fullness of conviction acknowledge, that he hath hereby deservedly gotten himself a name, which is above every name that ever was or shall be named, whether in Heaven or Earth, whether in this world or in the world to come; and does most peculiarly merit the most thankful and high adoration and praise of every creature, upon account of this wonderful work of our redemption in Christ.

BUT it will be asked, is this indeed the whole of christianity? I answer that it is not; for this religion is made up of threatenings as well as of promises; and denounces a Hell of never-ending torments to the wicked, as well as it engages a Heaven of the like happiness to the virtuous person. A declaration this, truly affecting and awful to the most virtuous of men; but, to the many wicked among us, so horrible, that it must make them wish, and eagerly too, that death may be to them what it is now frequently stiled, the end of all existence. But who are they with whom this must be the case? Why only with these men who will sacrifice the boasted dignity of rational and moral man, to the low appetites and passions of irrational and immoral brute. And where this is the cause of infidelity to any, how very base and detestable must the infidel be? Every animal is made to desire enjoyment, and man by knowing that there can be no enjoyment

joyment without existence, is made to desire existence, and this without end ; and herein his animal nature joins in with his reason, for it makes him abhor, and to the utmost of his power, to resist and strive against death and an extinction of being. And what is it then which can cause these people to wish for this extinction? Why it is, that they may here wallow in all sensuality without any thought or care of religion or futurity, and yet avoid that wounded conscience which would make them justly apprehend, that if there should be another life, they must be miserable in it ; for it is manifestly better not to be at all, than to subsist in misery.

AND does then their perfect and boasted religion of nature, bring them at last to this unnatural pass, that they will, upon the basest of motives, and contrary to their own nature and to the intention of their all-beneficent God, who has made them for an infinitely better existence than that of this life, and such glorious enjoyments in it, will they pin themselves down to the transitory, insignificant gratifications of this present world, and wish for nothing more, nay, that there might be no more, but all end with this life? Let there be but a place of any considerable profit or honour offered to any of them, and how will he rejoice in it, and what difficulties will he not go through to obtain or preserve it? And how is it then that this man shall spurn away from him the infinitely more valuable offer of an endless possession of inconceivable glory and happiness. This person may in this certainly see his own baseness, unreasonableness, and demerit. But as we made not ourselves, nor can alter that constitution of things which the divine will hath established, it is our chief business, in effect our only business, most carefully and impartially to enquire, whether these most important matters be not so as christianity has represented them ; and if they be, to conform ourselves to them ; for otherwise we may, and deservedly shall, undo ourselves by this most unreasonable and criminal neglect.

moderation

C H A P.

C H A P. III.

CH R I S T I A N I T Y tells us that there is to be another life after this, and that it shall be a state of retribution; and the natures both of God and man tell him the same. The heathen philosophers, through their ignorance of the divine being, and his moral and particular government of the world, could make nothing of this argument. Seneca, as well as Mr. Gibbons, tells us, that altho' they had promised, yet they had not proved this future existence: But it is not so with them whom christianity has enlightened.

MA N is a moral creature, and to be moral is to deserve love and reward, or hatred and punishment, for his good or evil behaviour; he feels that it is so. The divine being is likewise moral; moral in the highest possible degree, and must therefore have these affections to the man, and see that he merits the one or the other of these retributions. And shall he not deal with him in a manner conformable to them? This would be a direct contradiction to both their natures; and therefore he must, as certainly as he is moral himself, and much more as he is the moral governor of the world, reward the one and punish the other. And as this retribution is not always, perhaps never, adequately administered in this world, it must be so in another; and that constitution of nature, which the creator of the world hath established, demonstrates that it shall be so.

AL L happiness depends upon virtue; and, to be complete in happiness, we must be entire in virtue; for wherever vice is admitted, misery must be there. If then the all gracious God hath designed us for any happiness hereafter, and much more for a happiness which is to be complete and certain, he must breed us up to virtue here; for we are made every thing, we are even made reasoners by exercise and habit. And if we shall
accustom

accustom ourselves to contradict and despise the obligations of virtue for the love of sensuality and vice, we must, by a natural necessity, render ourselves incapable of happiness hereafter, and plunge ourselves into misery and ruin; and remain in this misery till we have changed our nature, and made that virtuous and good which was before vicious and bad. Religion and virtue are then the most important of all matters; and the infidel neglect of them the most irrational and destructive that can be. We must in this life take care to habituate ourselves to love, and to chuse the things which are good, and to abominate and cast from us the things which are evil. And man's own nature shews him that this was the very end of his creation, and the cause of his being introduced into the present world.

THAT man is detestable and vicious who is not governed by virtue; and virtue always requires, that in the things concerning itself, we act above this world; and where any competition comes between the interests of the two, that we act in direct contradiction to the latter, and sacrifice all the enjoyments of life, nay, and life itself, to the obligations of virtue; and this too, altho' it should be by the most painful of deaths. And so certainly as man's nature requires this of him, so certainly does it prove that he was made for a future life, and a just retribution in it: For otherwise his moral and all-gracious creator and governor, must have caused him to lose all enjoyment; nay, and his existence too, for the doing of that which he wills and requires him to do; must love him for having done, and for which he must see that he deserves a reward; and the higher reward, the more he acts in this manner. These things cannot be, it is impossible that they should be; and therefore a future life and a just retribution in it, are as certain to those who truly know their God, as that there is such a being, and that he made and governs the world. And in fact, a notion of this kind is so natural to man, that it has generally prevailed over the whole earth; and we can hardly find any nation, however

however barbarous, in which this has not been their belief; but so obscured and perverted, where christianity did not enlighten them, that it became useless, and even ridiculous to the thinking part of mankind.

How just and beneficial then is christianity, which hath opened and ascertained all these most important matters to us, and assured us all of everlasting life, glory, happiness, upon the easy terms of the gospel? And what shall we think of that person who by destroying christianity, would strip us of that hope so glorious in itself, and always so necessary to cheer us in the many misfortunes of this present life, and which would at the same time nearly reduce this world to a Hell of wickedness and misery. For the taking away all expectation of a future life, or retribution in it, must produce all these horrible effects. It must give to our animal and brutish appetites and passions, the entire dominion over the man, and thereby annihilate every thing which is worthy of esteem, or productive of happiness; and throw him into every vice which is most debasing and hurtful; and this not only to others but even to himself. And thus, having opened and vindicated the truth and benefit of christianity, in the foregoing most important particulars, upon the mistaking of which the greater part of our modern infidelity is founded, I shall proceed to examine Mr. Gibbons's objections against this religion, and return, as I hope, a satisfactory reply to them.

C H A P. IV.

IT is certain, from Mr. Gibbons's declaring the polytheistick worship of the heathens to be all foolish and false, and yet avoiding to give any commendation to that of the christians, which is all confined to the one true God, and is a spiritual service befitting his spiritual and infinite nature; but on the contrary blaming them for refusing all communication with the Heathens

in their religious offices, it is certain that he must totally condemn all adoration of God as a piece of superstition and folly. But, as christianity and Judaism, upon which it is founded, have laid the greatest stress upon this matter, and made divine worship the first of all duties, it is become absolutely requisite, that we enquire into the necessity and reasonableness of this worship; and this not only for the confutation of unbelievers, but also for the conviction of many of those who call themselves christians, but by the sophisms of our infidels, have been drawn into such a neglect and contempt of this great duty, as a total rejection of christianity, and indeed of all religion, can alone vindicate.

I WILL not suppose my antagonist to be an atheist, but a theist and a believer of God and his attributes, and upon this foundation will I argue the case with him. It is the office of reason to make us enquire and know, and principally in those things which are most excellent in themselves, and important to us. And as the being and nature of God, his government of the world, our dependance upon and obligations to him, and the returns which it is proper we should make for them, are of all other subjects the most noble and interesting, so must it be the principal end for which reason was given us, the chief of its offices, and our most important business to enquire into, and make ourselves knowing in all these matters. And upon any proper enquiry, we must find our God to be the creator of all things, that they all do subsist but by his will, and every one of them depend upon him for its being and all the blessings which any creature possesses. And we shall likewise find, that he is so perfectly excellent in himself, and so infinitely good to men, as to deserve all the esteem, reverence, love, thankfulness, which our hearts can contain. And when a sensibility of these things has been acquired, we must see it to be our duty, and the first of all duties, to entertain such affections for him, as are suitable to his all-perfect nature and our obligations, and from hence know, that we ought to take all proper means

means to entertain, preserve, invigorate, and express these sentiments to him; and as soon as the soul has contracted these dispositions, we shall prostrate ourselves before him in the most humble adoration of dependence, love, trust, gratitude, praise.

NEITHER is this grateful homage our duty only, but also our highest interest. Altho' man be at the head of our world, there is not any animal in it which has so many wants, and is of himself so little able to supply them. He is indeed that great beggar who subsists upon the joint alms of the whole creation. There is no other animal who feels such want of enjoyment, that is subject to so many evils, and suffers so often and grievously, as he; none of them which are so insecure in their blessings, nor troubled with these reasonable fears and anxieties which so often fill and torture the human breast. And if every man experiences these wantings in the affairs of this life, how much more does the religionist feel them in those of his eternal concerns? This is unquestionably his case; and by these wants, as well as his own natural inclinations, is he urged on, is he almost compelled to look out for some superior being, upon whose goodness and power he may depend for protection and for succour, suitable to his many dangers, and all his craving wants. And to his greatest possible advantage he may have all this in his almighty and most loving and kind God. For he himself has assured him, that he will upon his properly asking them in prayer, save him from every evil, and bless him with every good, so far as these shall be really beneficial to him. What an inestimable benefit then is this christian worship to men? When we, who must care for all these things, know that we can thus lay all our care upon one who careth for us, and is always as willing and ready, as he is powerful and mighty, to protect and save us.

BUT this is not all; the divine being stands in another relation to man, which is of all others the most important, and to which he ought most carefully to attend;

tend; namely, that he is the moral governor and judge of the world; which relationship, besides adding another reason for divine worship, will introduce a new and different species of it.

We know that the Heaven of Heavens cannot contain him, that he fills the whole of creation, and all space which is infinitely beyond it, and is more intimately present to every creature than any creature can be to itself, and understands much better whatsoever it thinks or acts; and with this absolutely perfect knowledge of them all, we know that he must, both from the nature of himself and his government, reward or punish men for their good or evil behaviour here. As man is then a sinner, and obnoxious to the divine vengeance, so must he in his adoration, address his God with these sentiments and expressions which are suitable to his sinful condition. He must, if he will hope for the so exceedingly wanted mercy and pardon from his offended God, who cannot be deceived, and is of too pure eyes to behold, or bear with iniquity, he must conceive and declare his sense of, and sorrow for his sins, confess them all to him, humble himself for them, resolve to amend them, and implore the forgiveness of them, and the divine assistance, to enable him to conquer them hereafter, and live a more virtuous life. That sinner, and every man is a sinner, who does not thus humble himself before his God for his manifold transgressions, has no knowledge of himself or the great governor of the world, nor any sense of, nor repentance for sin; and neither deserves nor is capable of mercy or happiness whilst he continues such. For, without a reformation of soul, he is disqualified for both of these; and he can have no reformation till he is filled with these dispositions and sentiments which I have now described.

AND here it is to be observed, that as the great end of all true religion and religious worship, is to qualify men for the favour and happiness of God, and neither of these is possible to be obtained but by virtue, so must all true religion tend to make us virtuous. And

as no means can be so powerful for this purpose, as those which shall beget in us an unfailling and most lively sense of the being of a God; and his constant inspection of, and regard to our behaviour as our just governor and judge; and prayer is the best means possible to preserve and enliven this sense; as also to breed in our hearts all these affections which are most virtuous and inciting to virtue; so is it from hence manifest, that prayer is not only the first but the most important of all duties; for to love that incomprehensible being who is all perfection, loveliness, goodness, and bliss, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind, and with all our strength, is both from reason and revelation, the greatest of all the commandments; and prayer is the breeding, exercising, and improving all these affections in us.

It is from hence now equally plain and certain, that it must prove a direct contradiction to the whole reason and nature of religious worship, to offer it up to any other than the one true God. And could then the primitive christians join in with the heathens in their religious services? No! To have given this to the highest and purest of angels would have been idolatry, and how much more so when these were performed to such abominable creatures, and in such abominable rites as the Heathen worship consisted of.

BESIDES, as the innocent and necessary business, refreshments, and amusements of this life must totally engross the man if there were not some proper means appointed by which to take off his attention from them, and fix it upon his infinitely more important concerns of futurity, so is prayer of all others the most forcible to work this effect upon him. And now let my reader think what an invaluable privilege it is to have the almighty governor of the world ever open to our petitions, and ready to grant them; and what a benefit christianity has conferred upon us in preserving and making acceptable our proper worship; and what an infinite prejudice it must do to the world to have both this religion and religious

religious adoration totally destroyed! In this have we a signal instance of the uncertainty and great imperfection of that religion of nature, as it is called, which our infidels would set up, and are used so mightily to extol, when the great genius and learning of Mr. Gibbons could not yet discover, that religious worship was at all a duty, or appropriated to the one true God; but he holds it all to be a piece of superstition and folly. It is not, however, a duty to be admitted by any deist; for this concession would necessarily imply, that the divine being had a regard to the behaviour of men, and was governor of the world; and this implication would so mightily disturb the quiet of those gentlemen who think with lord Bolingbrooke, that they can have no reason to fear God, tho' there should be a future life, for he can never do any of his creatures any harm; that this was by all means to be rejected from their belief. And here too, we have a signal instance of what the generosity and boasted dignity of these gentlemen amount to; who, instead of being moved to virtue by this unbounded goodness of their God, do, from hence, take occasion not only to neglect him and his particular duty, but to run into the most shameful and pernicious wickedness that the fashion of the world, or a regard to their own reputation, will allow of.

AND having now seen what heathenism was, and christianity is, and how exceedingly absurd and abominable the former, even in the most polished, inquisitive, and knowing nations; and how entirely true, useful, consistent, and important the latter; it will be easy to observe, that he must have a mind deeply prejudiced, who does not here discern the certainty and truth of the christian religion, and that founded not only on reason but in its goodness and happy effects; and see that it must come from that infinitely beneficent being, who loves, and would make happy, all his creatures; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to everlasting life.

C H A P. V.

MR. Gibbons, in page 220, accounts for the prevalence of the christian religion, in these words: *It was owing to the convincing evidence of the doctrine itself; and the ruling providence of its great Author.* What pity it is that this gentleman does not always write in the same manner! But afterwards, with a manifest inconsistency, applies all his endeavours to extirpate this religion, which in this place he so justly commends for its usefulness and truth. But leaving this to his own heart, whether for ridicule or seriousness, I am to observe, that one most material proof for our religion, is here totally suppressed; namely, the very numerous and stupendous miracles which Christ and his apostles worked for the confirmation of their divine mission; and which, as Dr. Watson observes, are in the scriptures so interwoven with their doctrines, that it is impossible to separate them the one from the other; and which, altho' they had all ceased with the lives of the apostles, were yet so authentically set forth by them in a most undoubted history, that all men might be as certain of them, as if they had been the objects of their own senses. Never men gave such proofs of their integrity, as the writers of them did; and all that they delivered was from their own certain knowledge, for they had seen and heard them. Nor were these miracles wrought in a dark corner, or in the presence of friends, to cover up or promote an imposture, or to prove things pleasing to the world, or where the great of it could be flattered by them; but it was to introduce a new and abominated religion, and in the presence of adversaries, the most eager and spiteful against them, and in a most knowing nation, who had all power in their hands, and were by the strongest ties, both of interest and inclination, driven on to discover and expose the cheat, if any thing of that kind would be found in them; but who, by authentick proofs drawn from their own writings, are shewn to have acknowledged them; only by ascribing them to magick,

magick, they destroyed their effects, and even made them the subjects of ridicule to their own people. Let us, however, go on to consider some of the internal evidences, which our author himself allows to be in christianity.

FOR a proper representation of this matter, in many of the most striking instances, I am happy in being able to refer the reader to Mr. Jenyns's late book upon this subject, who was once as much prejudiced, and wrote as perniciously against Christ's religion, as Mr. Gibbons himself; but to whom a thoughtful hour, when the vanities of this world ceased to have an undue influence upon his mind, brought conviction along with it; and this upon such just and forcible reasons, that if Mr. Gibbons will as justly consider them, as they are justly set forth, they will make a believer of him as they did of Mr. Jenyns. This being, however, a most important subject, I will add something both to its internal and external proofs.

THE latter gentleman, with the greatest truth, observes, that before christianity, there existed nothing like true religion upon the face of the earth, except only among the Jews, who were enlightened by christianity's precursor; for all of the heathens, as held by their greatest reasoners and wisest philosophers, was falsehood, superstition, idolatry. But Christ was a carpenter, and the reputed son of a carpenter; and his apostles all of them illiterate, and the most of them poor ignorant fishermen; and yet these low people have given to the world such a compleat rule of duty, both to God and man, that there is neither super-abundance or deficiency in it: but where the sharp eyes of a Shaftsbury condemns, and would have it amended, he would have but perverted and spoiled the whole by the proposed change. These men too, set forth in their writings, a scheme of providence so very high and wonderful, and so well adapted to, and explanative of, the ancient and previous revelation of the Jews; that we

may safely pronounce the invention of it to be far beyond all human wisdom, and much more the wisdom of these ignorant poor apostles.

THESE illiterate men also give us the history of the life, actions, teaching, of a man who assumed a character great beyond imagination, and to which nothing in this world was equal, or had any likeness to it; namely, of his being both God and man. And have they indeed made him act up to this claim? Let the reader know, to his astonishment, they really have; that they have done it in every instance, and where the things were most stupendous and difficult; where they were to fill up this seemingly contradictory character, long before described in many prophecies, and to be manifested by a series of miraculous works, which were totally beyond all human powers; and in which the greater part of this character was directly repugnant to their own expectations, their deepest prejudices, and all their hopes and comfort in this world; and the whole of these transactions described in the most plain and artless narration that ever was penned: And all this with a discovery of their own great faults, their worldly-mindedness, stupidity, and perverseness; and their master's reprehensions for them. Here have we internal evidence indeed, and I will besides add to it an external proof likewise.

It was impossible that the apostles could be deceived, or deceivers, and therefore their testimony is true. They must have known whether Christ taught such doctrines, worked such miracles, died upon the cross, was buried, rose again from the dead, and proved himself to be alive again by many infallible tokens; they must have known whether he did, according to the promise made them whilst he was alive, send down upon them after his death, the gifts of his holy spirit; whereby to make them know and receive his true religion, against which they were before most inveterately prejudiced; to understand and speak a variety of languages, with which they were before totally unacquainted; to enable them, in consequence of his previous promise, to perform

perform the same miracles which he had done in confirmation of their divine mission, and to give to these former worldlings and cowards, such a contempt for this world, such a regard for the truth, the salvation of men, and the rewards of virtue in a future life; and such an undaunted daring spirit in doing the thing which was right, as caused them, tho' before well warned of the fatal consequences of the thing, to go about and preach Christ's religion to every nation under heaven; and to persevere in this work, against all the persecutions which malice, power, cruelty, could inflict upon them; even to the most torturous of deaths. These things they must have all known, it was impossible for them to be deceived in any of them; and yet their master in sending them out, puts their mission upon such a bottom, as renders it impossible for them to be deceivers.

FOR as he did, contrary to all the ends of imposture, fix the truth of his own office upon his undergoing the most ignominious treatment and cruel death; so did he send out his apostles upon the same footing. His own words are, Behold I send you forth a sheep among wolves: Ye shall be betrayed by fathers, mothers, sisters, brethren: Ye shall be called before kings for my sake, scourged in their synagogues, put to death, and so hated of all men, that he who killeth you will think he doth God service. Very strange it is, that such religion as their's should produce such an effect; but he fore-saw, and predicted it to them; these predictions they every where published wherever they preached, and these miseries they were therefore as certainly to meet with, as their preaching was true; and they also told to their converts, that they should experience the same, and it proved so; and yet, they not only undertook, but persevered in this most difficult, dangerous, and unpromising work; and endured, in the prosecution of it, such opposition, hatred, inflictions, as it is hard to think how human nature could risque or any resolution enable them to bear them. Let the reader turn to 2 Cor. 11 chap. where St. Paul is forced to give an account of his own sufferings for the preach-
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ing the gospel, and he will find this thoroughly exemplified. And all this done by them, not to obtain any worldly advantage, but an excess of misery, and for the sole purpose of turning men away from every vice to every kind of virtue, and to the practice of every duty which can adorn and perfect human nature; and render men fit for the favour of their all-holy God, and that everlasting and inconceivable happiness which he hath created them for. A proceeding this which never could have flowed from any other source than such an uprightness of soul as made them incapable of any deceit.

THESE are but a very few of our evidences for christianity; and had the ingenious and learned Mr. Gibbons given a proper attention to them, few as they are, we never had been hurt, nor his country neither, by the infidel part of his book.

C H A P. VI.

NUMBERLESS passages in the history, shew that the author of it, intended it to destroy christianity entirely; and yet, page 219, it is with him a pure, humble, and commended religion. This is very surprising, but possibly it may be accounted for. Possibly he may suppose christianity to be what Dr. Tindal would seem to make of it; a republication of the religion of nature; which, altho' Christ and his apostles were a set of deceivers and profligate liars, yet have they given to the world in a much more perfect manner, than any others ever did; only they have mixed with it, a great many falsehoods and incredible facts; and what is worst of all, have given men occasion to fear, as well as to hope, by the declarations of it.

221; The religion and worship of the Jews are manifestly condemned, and Herodotus's account of their circumcision preferred before that of the scriptures, which tell us, that Abraham received it from God, and upon a particular occasion, and not from the Egyptians; but to which of them we ought to give credit, to them

or an author, confessedly fabulous in many instances, it is easy to see. There is nothing worthy notice in the next page, only that the abuse of the Jewish religion is taken from heathen malice and ignorance, and not from the truth. 223, The miracles which he would have ascribed to the convenience of the Israelites, should have been set down for the good of mankind, for the manifesting the true God, and his true religion and worship, which were then most miserably mistaken by the whole world; those only excepted whom he had enlightened by his own law. The pretended incredulity of the Jews has been shewn by Dr. Watson to be a mistake; christians, without abandoning their faith, are often tempted to distrust, and murmur against providence. But besides the Israelites, these great miracles of Moses, &c. must have been known to all the nations around them, and have had a very powerful effect to bring them back to the true religion, and the knowledge and worship of the one true God, from which they were all then most horribly estranged.

224, The Jewish establishment was justly appointed by a good God, not for conquest, but for the people's safety. The end of all true religion is virtue, and virtue is never promoted, but always destroyed, by conquests and large dominion; and therefore the Jews, altho' a very numerous and powerful nation, were never able to obtain a territory of any considerable extent; and this was peculiarly the case whilst they were under God's more immediate government, by his judges. That they worshipped the one true God, and him only, and with a service suitable to his spiritual and infinite nature, altho' here represented in an indifferent light, was to them in reality, the highest honour and the greatest advantage. 226, Christianity is here confessed to be founded upon, and armed with the Jewish law; and yet this law is all along condemned by Mr. Gibbons, and from hence we can easily discern what he thinks of this religion. The eternal life of glory, assured to every virtuous person by the gospel, warranted the most ardent zeal for it; and Christ's command to his apostles to go out and preach this religion to all the world,

world, and throughout such difficulties and sufferings, proved that it came from the almighty and beneficent God ; who can govern all creatures as he pleases, and make the meanest instruments effect the greatest purposes ; who would do every thing possible to benefit his creatures, and would most amply reward his faithful servants for any thing they had suffered upon his account, that is for doing good to his world.

227, Mr. Gibbons's words are : *Every privilege which could raise the proselyte from Earth to Heaven, or even gratify the secret pride, which under the semblance of devotion, insinuates itself into the human heart, was still reserved for the members of the christian church.* Was it a fault in Christianity, that it prepared men, by a christian and pure life here, for a Heaven of perfect happiness hereafter ; and assured those who were so prepared, of obtaining this inconceivable blessing ? And is it a fit epithet for christian devotion, because it brings us into an intercourse with the divine being, and makes us certain of being accepted by him, to call it a gratification of pride ? Or can indeed that religion render us proud, which tells us that our only worth arises from another, and that we are in ourselves, incapable of any access to God, even in our very best services ? What can this gentleman's notion of religion be ? If we are at all to pray, must it not be in hopes of being favourably heard ; and if we can be sure that we are so, must it not give us delight ? Christianity has shewn us that we are made for everlasting happiness, and that the means to obtain this happiness is virtue, and christianity is abundantly proved ; and therefore, as it must be most virtuous to receive, so must it be most criminal to reject such a religion, and such a conviction, as this.

THE enfranchisement of the christian church from the Jewish ceremonial law, was to the Jews a matter of great difficulty, and therefore of some length of time. And no wonder, when it had the rivetted prejudices, and the excessive pride of these Israelites, in being the chosen and peculiar people of God, to contend

tend with a master before it could be received. The arguments here offered against christianity, are acknowledged to have met with a confutation: But this in such a manner, as, in my opinion, to make them require a particular reply.

THE immutability of the God of the Jews, is no argument for the immutability of their law. The divine constitutions must be changed as the mutability and exigencies of that inconstant creature man, shall require. The religion of the patriarchs before Moses, was a divine law, as much as that which Moses himself gave; and yet his law made great alterations in it. All that could be wanted was a sufficiency for salvation, and this sufficiency might be obtained by various institutions, and different degrees of light. The great point of all was, along with this, properly to fore-shew and prepare men for the reception of a redeemer to come; and it might have been, it must have been, most prejudicial to have the whole of the design at once opened; it must have prevented the completion of it. God's providence is his infinite power, justice, wisdom, goodness, put into action; and it is most wickedly presumptuous for any man to find fault with it, when, to have any proper understanding of the matter, the whole of the case, with all the reasons upon which he acts, must be made known to us; but man can never see any thing like this, a most inconsiderable part only can possibly be discovered by him, probably not one link of the chain in a thousand; and it is a signal instance of the divine contrivance, that he has enabled us men, at all, to account for his workings, and vindicate them in so many instances as we really can.

THE repeal of the ritual law was more manifest than the establishment of it. The miracles wrought by Christ and his apostles, were as great, and out of all comparison, more numerous, than those of Moses and all the prophets put together; and the law itself, besides all its typical services which pointed to christianity, and received the whole of their value from this future dispensation, did, in many places, expressly declare, that
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it was to give way to, and be superceded by a new and better covenant. Great caution was, however, necessarily to be used in this matter, lest it should give occasion to the Jews to despise and cast off this law before its time, (to which they were for a great while strangely inclined,) which was in time to bring them to Christ, and the rest of mankind along with them: The principal design and the very end of the law.

THAT Christ and his apostles observed it, is no proof of its perpetuity. These were all Jews, and therefore, in conscience, obliged to keep it as long as it lasted; and this was till our Saviour's dying, rising again, ascending into Heaven, the immediate presence of the father, and sending down from hence the gifts of his holy spirit upon men, had fulfilled and abrogated the whole ritual part of the law. Modern discoveries in the Hebrew have made it plain, that the most material of its rites, were appointed to shadow forth our redemption in Christ.

A FULL knowledge of christianity was not at once given to the apostles; they were not, for some time, *able to bear it*; and if it had been given, they might, without incurring the charge of ambiguity, which is here laid upon them, have acted as they did. They might yield to men's weaknesses in innocent matters, rather than by insisting upon them, to cut off many well-meaning, but deceived men, from all hope of salvation. This was the known practice of St. Paul. He conformed to the Jewish prejudices in some lesser matters, to take away their offence against christianity; but when the necessity of these was insisted upon, he refused to conform, and utterly condemned and rejected them all. This was also the decision of the great council of Jerusalem, so soon after Christ, that some of the apostles assisted in it; and as certainly as Christ sent out his apostles to preach his religion, so certainly was the opinion of the Judaizing christians false, that it was still necessary to be circumcised, and to keep the law. Christ Jesus came into the world to save the whole of it, and not

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one family only, or his own family more than any other: Father, mother, sisters, and brethren, were they who kept his commandments.

C H A P. VII.

THE five next pages I think of no consequence, but the 232d is a laboured attempt, by the means of the antient Gnosticks, to destroy the Jewish law; as by the means of this law, he had before endeavoured to destroy christianity. And as these arguments are not replied to by Dr. Watson, but a reference made to others for the confutation of them, I shall, to save the readers trouble, myself give a particular answer to them.

POLYGAMY was permitted, but not enjoined, by the Jewish law; and our Saviour's argument that only one woman was at first made for one man, when the world most needed population, was an unquestionable proof that God so intended it, and that it always ought to be so. David and Solomon were men, and therefore sinners, but the former of these an excellent man, tho' still a sinner. Men are made for a future life; it is the great end of their being, and when the religion and practice of any people become incurably wicked, and destructive of that end, it then becomes the divine goodness totally to destroy them, and especially those of them who are yet innocent; that so he may hinder others from being by them corrupted, to their destruction; and by this past vengeance deter them from following their wicked example. And these reasons are over and over again declared by Moses, to be the causes of the Canaanites extirpation. The great governor of the world is not found fault with for sending plagues, famines, and the most destructive wars, among men, to punish them for their wickedness; and how much better must it serve to this purpose, to make professedly another people the executioners of his vengeance, whom he hath warned against these abominable crimes, and caused to inflict this punishment upon them? A most necessary caution this to the people of our countries,
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and especially to the propagators of infidelity among us; for whenever the rejection of christianity, and a wickedness without fear becomes prevalent among us, it will then be the case with us, as it was with the Canaanites, and at last with the Jews themselves, we shall be totally destroyed.

THE Gnosticks had the whole world against them, as to bloody sacrifices, and were as certainly wrong, in condemning them before Christianity, as Christianity itself is true; which yet they pretended to believe. These sacrifices clearly shewed, that some expiation, besides the sinner's repentance, was necessary to take away sin; and that sin was so excessively odious to the Divine Being, that it could not be expiated, but by the greatest possible punishment to the oblation, even the death of it. And the Jewish law, besides, by making this sacrifice an expiation for sin, and so to save the life of the sinner, did manifest, that a vicarious punishment should be accepted for him; and thus pointed out, and prepared the world, for the receiving that stupendous atonement, which was to be made in due time, for the sins of all mankind, by the death of the Son of God; and thereby fitted men for the embracing that religion, which was to be founded upon it, when it should be preached to the world; and which, without this previous preparation, we may certainly conclude, would never have been embraced by it. These were certainly the ends of bloody sacrifices; although, it must be confessed, that all the Gentiles, and the generality of the Jews, had, for a long time before, lost all just notion of them.

IT is true, that the Mosaick law was built upon temporal promises, the promises of the land of Canaan, and prosperity in it; but these were understood by the virtuous among them, as intended to shew forth an infinitely better life in the world to come. And if these retributions, abstracted from this latter expectation, be insufficient to combat with the outrageous appetites and passions of men, when administered by human weakness and ignorance, as they confessedly are, yet must they have a much more powerful effect, when they are dispensed

pensed by the hands of him, who can neither be resisted or deceived; and more especially, as he had by many, the most severe punishments, manifested his great displeasure to sin, and vengeance against it; and had besides, in his law, given so many hints of a future life, and a just retribution in it. By these means must the temporal sanctions of the law have had a very powerful effect upon the Jews; certainly, a much more powerful effect, than that to which our infidels are all endeavouring to reduce us; who neither allow any future life, nor a moral governor of the world, nor any regard in him to the behaviour of any man. An important matter this, well worthy of these gentlemen's most serious consideration, who yet blame the Jewish law for its deficiency in this matter, when they themselves are endeavouring to reduce the world to an infinitely worse pass.

It is also to be added, that the most merciful judge of the world, will certainly treat these comparatively ignorant men with a greater lenity, and upon easier terms of acceptance than the others, to whom he has communicated a greater degree of knowledge, and more powerful motives of obedience, and so the gospel tells us it shall be: The times of this ignorance God winked at. If nothing, however, of better information had been given to the Jews, they would not have been left in a worse condition than the rest of mankind, who were to be saved as well as they; but even we can, in our weakness, discover some probable reasons, why a future life of just retribution, was not yet thoroughly opened, and ascertained to mankind; namely, that till Christ had, by his death, made atonement for the sins of the world; and, by his resurrection and ascension into heaven, and the merits of his entire obedience on our account, had procured us an entrance into this place of everlasting bliss, it might carry with it too great an extenuation of the evil of sin, (the heinousness of which, it is the great business of all true religion to manifest and aggravate) to make the blood of a beast expiate sin, and procure pardon and salvation to the sinner, and this in the favour, mansion, and happiness, of an all holy and just God. Besides, to have declared that any possible obedience

dience of sinful man, should entitle him to this perfect happiness, would be at once to destroy that whole scheme, of redemption which the divine wisdom, holiness, goodness, had planned for the salvation of the world, and all true religion, consequent of Adam's fall. And to have openly foretold, that this should be brought to pass, by the obedience and death of the Son of God, must certainly have prevented the completion of the design; for then, neither would the Jews have crucified Christ, nor the devils have tempted them to it.

It is not true, that eternal damnation came upon all men by the fall of Adam. The atonement made by Christ, (he is the lamb slain from the foundation of the world,) extends to all mankind, whether living before, or after him; and will certainly save all those who set up to the best light they could have. If God at all speaks to men, it must be in a manner intelligible to them; and therefore, in giving an account of his creating the world, he must express himself as working, as finishing his work in six days, as ceasing from it, as resting, and being refreshed on the seventh. But both scripture and reason tell us, that we are to remove all imperfection from these words when applied to him; and it is well known, that Moses's description of this matter is so just and noble, as to have gained him an universal admiration. And it is also to be observed, that at the very time he uses these expressions of resting, being refreshed, &c. he tells us, God only speaks, and the thing is created and done. The formation of Eve out of Adam's rib, was necessary to make them both and all mankind, who were to descend from them, one flesh; and to manifest to them and all others, how man and wife ought to love and be joined to each other. And as the want of this rib in Adam, was a perpetual memorial of this transaction as long as Adam lived, so was the want of a navel in them both, an undoubted conviction that they were the first man and woman, and that they and the world were created by God, and received at such a time their existence from him.

THE placing this pair at first in a garden, wherein was made to grow every plant which was good for food, sight or smell, was a proper means to make them, at once, acquainted with every production of nature, and thereby render them more sensible of, and thankful for, the divine goodness; as was likewise the bringing all the animals before Adam, that he might view and name them; who, by being able to do this with such justice, that their creator himself approved of his names, clearly manifests the wonderful perfection of man before his fall, and the prodigious degradation to which this fall has reduced him. The prohibiting them only the fruit of one tree, out of the prodigious profusion which abounds throughout all the world, namely, of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was a positive command, and such only could be given them in their state of innocence and virtue; but this was entirely proper to keep them ever mindful of their God, and his government over them, and their absolute dependence upon him; as also, we may be sure to give them in that state, the probation which was most necessary and proper for the breeding them up to virtue, and thereby securing to them at the last, that perfect happiness, which their good God intended and created them for. And here it may not be amiss to mention another instance of the Creator's care to impress a deep sense of his dependence upon Adam's mind. Eve was not formed, till after he had viewed every animal, and seen them in pairs, and in company; and how must he have been affected, to have found himself, who, the most of all wanted, and was the best fitted for society, totally destitute of it? The whole world must then have appeared a desert to him, and have made him desire, long for, and eagerly pray to his God, to give him this so much wanted companion; and this with such a pining after it, as might well throw him into that slumber or trance, wherein the rib was taken out of him, Eve formed, and all the rights of marriage revealed to him. And when by this instance, as well as many others, he was made duly sensible of his dependence upon God, behold his wife is presented to his view, all perfect, out of the hands of their gracious God, and to be sure, more lovely and beautiful, both in
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body and soul, than ever any of that most beautiful sex ever was. Here had he an equal cause given him, both for humility and thankfulness. The Devil, who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning, spoke in the body of the serpent, but pretended that he both reasoned and talked by the virtue of this forbidden fruit, which he eat before the woman, and thereby ensnared her and Adam; and it would have been to their everlasting ruin, had not the mercy of God interposed to save them. Numberless possessions of this kind, and even of men, to shew how man at first fell, are recorded in the gospel, by whose organs the devils spoke and conversed.

THE fall of Adam which comprehended in it the fall of all mankind is indeed a very difficult subject to speak of; but in a matter of such exceeding height and difficulty, it ought not to be any argument against it; that we could not at all account for this providence, because it is one of the most stupendous, itself, in truth the most high and stupendous of all the workings of this one infinite being, who is higher than the heavens above us, and must infinitely transcend the reach of all the highest creatures, till he himself shall be pleased to open and declare something of the matter. But something he hath opened to us, and with a proper consideration of this, we may possibly come to some knowledge of this providence.

THE end of all God's creating and working, is most assuredly to communicate happiness; this end must principally be obtained by his making himself more known, who is perfect excellence, and must ever be glorified by all his works, and fill all the highest faculties of his highest creatures with the greatest delight; and these works shall best answer this purpose, which are made with such a variety, as shall in their formation, shew more of his power, wisdom, goodness; and truly wonderful is that variety of every kind, which we experience in this our little world. And, as in our world, so, certainly, in others, as well as in ours; and the different colours and sizes of the several planets in our system, make it plain, that he has done so in them. We are then to look for a wonderful peculiarity in his several worlds;

worlds; and, as in the worlds, so in the creatures, and, as in the creatures, so in the providences by which they shall be governed and conducted to their happiness. It was the eternal purpose of God, to redeem man by Jesus Christ; man's fall was therefore foreseen, and permitted to be brought about by the malice of the devil; and, certainly, because the divine wisdom and goodness had determined to provide a remedy for the mischiefs of it; which should at once, do the most honour to himself, and benefit to all his creatures. Because it should open his nature and beneficence in the most astonishing instances, and make this beneficence be productive of the greatest good.

REASON and revelation equally shew, that to be happy we must be virtuous, and to be complete in happiness, we must be entire in virtue; and experience along with these equally manifests, that we cannot have this unfailing virtue, but through the exercise and habit of a previous probation. The most strengthening of all probations must undoubtedly be the experiencing the misery of sin, without being undone by the evil of it; and, therefore, has the infinite wisdom of the Divine Being, and his goodness to his creatures, contrived a way to give man this most necessary and useful probation; and this by the most astonishing providence that his infinity has ever afforded, or ever will afford.

As all men were permitted to fall by the weakness and fault of one man, so was it fitting, and, indeed, absolutely necessary, that he should be redeemed by the strength and virtue of another; and therefore was mankind suffered to come into such a condition by the sin of Adam, as did necessarily require that the goodness, nay, the justice of the Creator should interpose, and remedy this evil by some extraordinary providence. And we find, by Christianity, that he has done so; and has, at the same time, most benefitted his creatures, and done the highest honour to himself; for he has thereby given them the most advantageous probation, and shewn himself in the most lovely and glorious light. I am confident, that these reasonings are well founded, and just; and, if they be,

what a monster is our deism for its presumption, ingratitude, folly!

To the charge of the god of the Jews being liable to passion and error, capricious in his favour, implacable in his resentments, meanly jealous of his own superstitious worship, and confining his partial providence to a single people and this transitory life, I need only, after what has been already said, observe, that whenever his moral creatures change in their behaviour to him, their great governor must, in his affections to them; that his abhorrence of vice is the greatest that can be, because most contrary to his own nature, and destructive of all happiness; and that the welfare of the whole world requires him to manifest the most dreadful detestation of it; that he is jealous of his own worship, because it is the first and most important of all duties; and that it is a most palpable and strange mistake, to make him confine his providence to the Jews, when the scriptures, by so many and severe instances shew, that he extended it also to the Gentiles. And, as to the last charge, that of his chusing the Jews for his own people, and leaving the heathens to themselves, I reply, that when we have a history of God's moral government of the world so well authenticated as that of the Old Testament, it must be most presumptuous and criminal in any man, to find fault with this dispensation upon his own foolish conjecture. The one all-wise Being may have many and the best reasons for acting in such a manner, although every one of them should be undiscoverable by us; and they should, in our weak eyes, all of them seem contrary to wisdom and goodness, and even to justice itself. But this is not the case here, we can discern many reasons for his leaving the heathens to themselves, and taking the Jews into his peculiar protection and government, and revealing himself and their duty to them.

THE former of these providences might be necessary to shew the sad and ruinous condition of man when left to himself; and to manifest the absolute necessity, both of a redeemer and of a revelation, whereby, not only to atone for sin, but to instruct in righteousness, and the virtuous

virtuous means necessary to our future salvation ; which necessity Mr. Gibbons knows to be even now denied by many of our people. And then, by God's winking at, and making proper allowances for their almost invincible ignorance, this ignorance might be as profitable, or more so, to their salvation, than a greater degree of light and knowledge. But, as the leaving the whole earth in such excessive darkness, might cause them to degenerate so far as would be destructive of all virtue and happiness, and as the chusing one people to himself, and instructing them in his true religion and virtue, and making it known that he did himself govern all things, and would not only reward the virtuous, but also punish the wicked, as by these means, he should do the more good to them, keep the others to more knowledge and better obedience, and give himself an opportunity of reclaiming the rest whenever he should think fit ; and as this would require such providences not otherwise to be introduced, as would be peculiarly honourable to himself, and beneficial to his creatures ; and more especially, as this particular law should foreshew and keep up the expectation of that wonderful redeemer, who was not immediately, but in the fulness of time, to come into and save the world ; so, for these reasons, and, to be sure, infinite others unknown to us, was it equally wise and good in the Creator and governor of all things to leave the heathens thus far to themselves, and take to himself the Jews for his peculiar people. And here we can certainly see, that the very stubbornness and rebellions of this nation were of peculiar service to the world ; as by God's so severely punishing them for their wickedness, he demonstrated the falsehood of that antient destructive opinion of all the philosophers, and this modern one of all our unbelievers, that the God of the world cannot hurt or make miserable any of his creatures. But I might have cut short this defence ; for, let the deists say what they will, they must either acknowledge polytheism to be a true religion, or confess that God did reveal himself to the Jews, and to the Jews only.

AND now the reader may see that we can effectually defend the holy scriptures of the Old Testament against

these self-sufficient hereticks, without having recourse to any allegory, whose particular tenets were so unreasonable and ill-founded, that, were I to repeat them, they would appear rather to deserve the name of mad men, than that of knowers, which they most arrogantly assumed to themselves. And if the primitive christians did give a little into allegory, this is certainly to be excused by Mr. Gibbons, who knows that the philosophers were compelled to allegorize the whole of the heathen religion, in order to make any defence at all for it, and this with such a force and absurdity, that it made them a ridicule to some of their own people.

WHAT credit their assertion of the church's corrupting the scriptures deserves, is manifest from hence, that christianity is as certainly founded upon Judaism, as christianity is true; and yet all these Gnosticks condemned and rejected that religion. Tertullian tells us, that the hereticks of his time were wont to make the same false charge against the church; but he confutes them, by appealing to all the great churches founded and taught by the apostles; which, by all agreeing in one doctrine, and this doctrine conformable to that of the scriptures, demonstrated that this was the true faith, and not that which those people set up in opposition to it. And it is manifest, that the many dissensions which were among the christians themselves, and which made them a continual watch upon each other; the numberless copies taken, and every where spread abroad, of the scriptures; and the many translations made of, and quotations taken from them, must have rendered all wilful and material corruption of them, utterly impossible.

Mr. GIBBONS thinks, that, altho' these people disturbed the peace of the church, they did not retard, but further the progress of it. But our saviour was of a very different opinion, and so was another person too, not at all deficient in cunning. Christ tells us, it was the devil who sowed tares among his good seed of the word: and did he this indeed to serve christianity? Does not Mr. Gibbons know, that the people of his principles,

as well as the papists, make the uncertainty of the scriptures sense, and the christian dissensions about it, an argument against our religion. Can it be denied, that the papists did, by these means, put a stop to the reformation, which otherwise threatened to annihilate the Romish church ; and that they have ever since been endeavouring to destroy our's, by the same means ; and did, for a time, accomplish its ruin, in the reign of Charles the 1st. and is it any adequate advantage, that a dissenter is now and then gained over to this church, as was the case with Augustine ?

C H A P. VIII.

PAGE 238. We have here a keen ridicule upon the primitive christians, for their notion of evil malicious devils, and their supposing them to be the authors of idolatry ; but, if they believed the scriptures, they must have believed this, for what thinks he of these passages, and numberless others which might be produced ? He was a liar and a murderer, from the beginning, the devil entered into Judas, the Gentiles sacrificed to devils, and not unto God ; all these will I give thee if thou wilt fall down and worship me ; and of the numberless possessions recorded in the New Testament ? It may seem strange and unaccountable to us, as it did to lord Bolingbrooke, that such evil beings should be suffered in the world by a good God ; but this only shews us how little able we are to judge of the divine ways. Nothing but the malice of these impure spirits, could have inspired the impure, cruel, and murderous idolatry practised by the heathens ; and we find many of that cast still among men. Many powerful tyrants, who desolate whole nations by all the rapines and cruelty of bloody and unjust wars ; and many who are more pernicious than they ; many who employ the whole of their great abilities, to destroy all religion, and consequently, all happiness either here or hereafter, and reduce, even this world, to a hell of misery. But this disbelief of devils is a necessary part of the deistical negative creed. For, if angels, so much superior

superior to men, could yet, by their wickedness, be so lost to all virtue and happiness ; it might be, it must be so, with men likewise ; and then there would be room for those fears in the hearts of profligates, which it is the great end of our infidelity totally to expel. And here it is to be observed, that our modern deists all go against their own scriptures ; namely, the opinions of the philosophers, in this matter ; for they, with the christians, all acknowledged the reality of these evil beings which our modern infidels do all deny and ridicule.

As to the great caution of the christians not to join in any of the heathen idolatries, they had abundant reasons for it. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve, was to them the first and greatest of all commandments ; and therefore ought to be the most strictly observed. But here I cannot help expressing my astonishment at Mr. Gibbons's making the want of intercourse between them and the heathens, which this must necessarily occasion, the first of his causes for the growth of christianity, when it was so manifestly fitted to obstruct or totally destroy it. That it contributed to its preservation, cannot, I think, be denied ; for had the christians joined themselves to the heathen worship, it must, in my opinion, have hurt or annihilated their religion ; but, altho' this was a necessary means of preserving christianity, it cannot be set down for the farthering its growth, but by such a far-fetched and indirect inference, that I am confident Mr. Gibbons will not insist upon it.

THE 2d of his secondary causes is, the doctrine of the soul's immortality. He seems, a few pages before, to believe this future immortality, and a just retribution in it ; yet, here he attributes the reception of them in the eastern countries to an established priesthood, which employed the motives of virtue as an instrument of ambition. But certainly he might have discovered a better reason for this most important belief : He might have founded it upon a notion so natural to man, that it has generally prevailed over the whole world, and
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even in the most barbarous nations; and upon an intercourse in the east, with the patriarchs and Jews, who all expected this future existence, who had many hints for it in the writings of Moses, and open declarations of it in the psalms and the prophets; and in the book of Job (at least as ancient as any of the scriptures) a probable reason was given why it was not entrusted to the hereditary priesthood of Aaron. But this is only an objection against providence, which ought never to be made; because we can never judge of this matter with any propriety, till we can, and do, see all the reasons upon which the Divine Being acted; which is utterly impossible to men, or indeed, to any creature.

246. He asserts that all the Jews, from Moses to their return from the captivity of Babylon, did not believe the soul's immortality, altho' he had before acknowledged that many expressions in the prophets did indicate such. And here I will return an answer to that objection against the Jewish law, that it was founded upon temporal promises, and gave no notion of a future life; which, that I might take in the whole of the matter at one view, I did reserve to this place.

It is true that Moses did found his law upon temporal promises; but these promises intended to reach beyond this present world; and he has therefore, in his writings, given us many hints which are decisive for a future life. That Adam was not to die if he did not transgress, and when he did transgress, and must experience a temporal death, that yet his seed was totally to conquer his enemy; which would neither have been done, nor prove a comfort to him, unless death was to be conquered likewise; that he was certainly to die for his sin, and yet an atonement made by sacrifice for it, and accepted by God; and that he called his wife's name Eve, in Hebrew life, because she was to be the mother of all living, rather of all life, or of him who was life; that righteous Abel was killed because he was righteous, and his sacrifice accepted by God; that Enoch was taken away because he walked with God and pleased God, who also left a prophecy preserved

served to the apostles times, of God's coming in another life to judge the wicked; that God stiled himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, some hundred of years after the death of them, which phrase shewed them to be still in being, and he the greatest good to them; and this too by the name of Elahim, which is covenanters by an oath or curse, and this oath certainly to redeem man. These things did abundantly prove a future existence, and that of retribution from the writings of Moses alone. And, besides the many declarations for this future hope, in the psalms and prophets, we have Elijah and Elisha raising the dead, and the former of these visibly ascending into Heaven, to confirm this hope. And we know likewise, from the epistle to the Hebrews, that it was the very intention of the Jewish tabernacle and temple, and the most solemn service of them, to shadow forth our entrance into a Heaven of the highest happiness, by the atonement which our great high priest and redeemer, was to make of himself for the sins of the whole world.

We may expect then to find the belief of the Jews directly contrary to Mr. Gibbons's assertion; and so it is undeniably proved to every christian, by St. Paul Heb. xi. 13. And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims upon earth. 14. For they that say such things, confess plainly that they seek another country. 16. A better country, that is a heavenly. 32. For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barach, and Sampson and Jephtha, David, Samuel, and the prophets. 39. And these all having obtained a good report by faith received not the promise.

247. HE has my thanks for saying that the doctrine of life and immortality is dictated by nature, approved by reason, and confirmed by the example and authority of Christ; for if any truth be in any of these matters, and more especially in the latter of them, christianity is truth; and whether it were or not, if such a future life be received, it is manifest; that wickedness must disqualify for the happiness of it; and then there must be in every way an end of infidelity. For the

the certain knowledge which christianity gives us of this future life, and our salvation in it, will take away all prejudice against this pure religion, and then it shall be as universally, as it will be reasonably, embraced.

THAT the expectation of Christ's immediate coming to judgment, was not justly founded upon scripture, has been made certain by Dr. Watson ; I will, however, add for the farther clearing of this matter, that every one acquainted with the exposition of the prophecies, knows, that there is a figurative, as well as a literal meaning intended in them. Sir Isaac Newton has a particular treatise upon this head, and that sun, moon, stars, heavens, and earth, and seas, &c. signify kings, rulers, nations, people's civil policies; that in this sense, our saviour's prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, was all fulfilled in that generation ; altho' in the literal sense, it shall not be till the end of this world. St. Paul has convinced us as well as 17 centuries, that it was not to be in his time. 2 Thess. ii. 2.

249, THE doctrine of the millenium is so thoroughly cleared by Dr. Watson, that I shall say no more to it, than that it is very strange in Mr. Gibbons, to make the joys of a future earthly habitation, have greater force to promote christianity, than the joys of God's own habitation, and an heaven of unutterable bliss ; and this too, when none but martyrs were to partake of them. It is also surprising to make the christians threatening damnation to the heathens, a principal motive of their conversion, when these could hardly have any intercourse with the others, when they and their religion were so hated and despised by them ; when all retribution was denied by all their philosophers ; and when it was by this conversion, absolutely required, that they should abandon every vice, and live the most careful and virtuous lives in every instance afterwards ; and this too under a more severe and certain ruin for their being christians, if they did not ; and when too, we experience that these are the very things, these threatnings and these severe lives which

make

make so many heathens among us christians, at this day. The double sense of the prophecies, explains all these expressions of the precious stones with which the new Jerusalem was to be built, upon which this gentleman plays with so great an impartiality.

As to the conflagration of Rome, and the world, and his attributing our sense of the former to our prejudices against popery, I must say, that either he has not read the late protestant writers upon this subject, or else he has a most unjust partiality to that corrupted, idolatrous, and bloody church; but this is not the only instance in which I have found the deists favourable to popery.

254. His 3d cause of christianity's growth, is the miraculous powers of the primitive christians.

HE says, with a sneer, the deity suspended the laws of nature for the benefit of religion: be it so then; but it was because religion is the happiness of those creatures for whose benefit these laws were instituted. He quotes Irenæus for saying, the knowledge of foreign languages, altho' communicated to others, was not so to him when he preached the gospel to the natives of Spain: but he ought to have known, that this is an imposition put upon the reader and him, by Dr. Middleton; for Irenæus says no such thing. Theophilus was right in not undertaking to raise a dead man for the conviction of a noble Greek. It was the Divine Being who was to work the miracle, and he might find cause to refuse it, altho' to men it might seem ever so proper. The apostles themselves could only work miracles when the all-knowing spirit of God urged them to it. Christ Jesus would not gratify Herod with the sight of one miracle, altho' it might have saved his life. His account of the christian inspiration is so certainly false, that the only thing to be said in his vindication, is, that he never examined the matter, but trusted to Dr. Middleton, without reading the answers given to his book; which, to speak the truth of it, is wrote with a prejudice and disingenuity that are the most disgraceful to any cause,

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or to any author. Let any one but read over 1 Cor. 14th chap. and he will see that the christian inspiration was the farthest in the world from being an unreasonable furor or madness; for ver. 32. The spirits of the prophets were subject to the prophets.

If this Dr. were treated in the same way that he has treated the primitive fathers, whom he so severely condemns for some erroneous reasonings, and, as he will have it, misrepresentation of facts, that they are not to be credited in any thing about religion, his own character would suffer a great deal more than their's has done, by this kind of treatment. This gentleman makes use of a great artifice and dissingenuity to discredit the miracles of the primitive christians; and has inserted some passages in his book which equally discredit all miracles in general; which passages, tho' often called upon, he would never retract: This gentleman did, in like manner, publish a book against prophecy, by which he rendered that proof of our religion equally nugatory and ridiculous, and thereby destroyed the two great foundations of christianity; and yet this author held to his death an ecclesiastical preferment in our christian church, and was very angry to the last, that he could not get in it a more ample provision; and ought we to give him any credit in these matters?

TERTULLIAN's apology was written to the Roman magistrates, upon their persecution of the christians, and it is hard to think that he would put the defence of his cause upon a certain imposture. His words are, *I come now to things, and give you a demonstration from facts, that your gods and the daemons are the same. Let a Daemoniac be brought into court, and the spirit which possesses him be demanded by any christian to declare what he is, and he shall as truly confess himself to be a devil, as he did before falsely pretend to be a God. If all these do not declare themselves in court to be devils, not daring to lie in the presence of a christian, that christian is willing to be taken for a cheat, and to answer for it in his own blood.* It is to be observed, that all this was to be done in a heathen court, and upon a person produced by themselves;

selves; and therefore certainly known by them, and liable to the most careful inspection, and where too all power was in their hands; and there could therefore be no possibility of a christian juggle: And now let any one judge whether that person could be right in his senses who would place his religion, comfort, life, and the lives of all of his profession, upon such a defence; if this defence were really false and an imposture. But, lest this proof should be thrown off by a reference to Dr. Middleton's free enquiry, I shall, for this once, subjoin an examination of his reasoning upon this head.

To say that the christians were then too poor to have a sufficient number of their apologies transcribed, when so very few of them would have served this purpose, when they were so numerous in Bethynia long before this, as almost to annihilate the heathen worship, by Pliny's confession; when Tertullian himself asserts the senate, the army, &c. to be all full of them; and Cyprian did, not long after this, and in this very place, raise above 800 pounds at once, for the redemption of christian captives; and Mr. Gibbons owns, they did then make up a tenth part of the city of Carthage: To say that the heathen magistrates did not think it worth their while to enquire into these matters, when Pliny did put two women to the rack for this purpose, and these magistrates were every day examining, imprisoning, torturing, banishing, confiscating the goods of, and putting the christians to the most cruel deaths, for their faith: To say that the christians had then a particular order of men to take care of, and instruct and cure these possessed people, and lodgings in their churches provided for them; when they were but now so poor as not to get a few books transcribed for the saving their lives and fortunes; when he has not any authority for such a supposition at that time, but many against it, as may be seen in Mr. Bingham's christian antiquities; and we may be sure the heathen magistrates would never suffer any of those to be brought into examination, nor could the christians be able to collect and support them all. To say such things in
confutation

confutation of Tertullian's challenge, and of almost all the other christian writers before and after him, and Dr. Middleton says them all, speaks not any fairness of mind, but the deepest and most rancourous prejudice. And here I will advise Mr. Gibbons not to follow Mr. Voltaire, as he here has the Dr. in his future history, when he comes to the worship of images in the christian church; because this great genius's account of this matter is totally copied from Baronius; and where the interest of the Roman church is concerned, there cannot be a more partial and unjust historian than this very great and learned cardinal.

257, It will readily be acknowledged, that the pretended miracles of the church of Rome, have much hurt our religion with many people; but it ought not to be so. Real miracles will probably introduce a pretence to feigned ones. And if it is considered that the popish miracles are only propagated and believed where their religion entirely prevails, and no examination can be made of them, it must appear that this is no just argument against those of the primitive christians, where every thing was the reverse with them; and yet they boldly required an examination of them by their most powerful, obstinate, and cruel enemies. A distinction this so manifest; that it is wonderful how Mr. Gibbons could overlook it, and so confound times together, as to make it impossible to say when miracles did cease, because always reported to continue in the church, when both from this and the settlement of christianity, we can gradually see the no-necessity of them, and the certain falsehood of these contemptible late reports.

We find, from the replies given to Dr. Middleton, that several christian writers of the 3d and 4th centuries did acknowledge miracles to be then very rare among them, and nearly to have ceased from the church; and we can easily discern the fitness of this proceeding. As christianity was the power of God to salvation, it was absolutely necessary for him, if he meant us this salvation, to support it by his own miraculous power so long as this extraordinary interposition was requisite.

And

And, considering the nature of his religion, that it had nothing in the world to recommend it, but all the pleasures, interests, prejudices of it, to obstruct and destroy its progress; and considering that these miraculous powers were scarcely less necessary after, than before the death of the apostles, and that many others, besides the apostles, were, in their own times, endowed with these gifts; these things considered, we have the justest reason to believe, they still continued in the church; and that the testimony given of them by so many writers, is well founded and true. But so soon as Christianity was able to stand upon its own legs, so soon as men's prejudices against it were pretty well worn off, and the powers of this world were no longer its enemies, but became its friends and supporters, and it could, by the common course of nature, maintain and increase itself, so was it fit, that this extraordinary interposition should be gradually lessened, and, at the last, totally taken away. This reasoning is manifestly just, and I can confirm, by an instance, which, I am confident, Mr. Gibbons will not controvert.

In the middle of the fourth century, when Julian the apostate Emperor, in order to invalidate our Saviour's prophesy about the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, did call home the Jews to their own country, and employ both the power of this zealous people, and all the strength of his own mighty dominions to execute this purpose; and when there were no human means, which could possibly defeat it, the hand of God did itself visibly interpose, and by shakings of the earth, which threw up the foundations, and fire bursting out, which consumed the workmen and their work, compel them to desist from, and abandon the undertaking. And this miraculous fact is acknowledged in the history of Ammianus Marcellinus, who, as a heathen writer, may be believed, and who, as writing against his own principles, must be believed in his account of this matter. And thus are the suppositions of Dr. Middleton, and of Mr. Gibbons, both of them destroyed by a heathen attestation, and mine as undoubtedly confirmed.

260, 4th CAUSE of the growth of Christianity, the good lives of the Christians.

IT is certain, that all the primitive apologists did boast of the virtue of the Christians, and it is here acknowledged to be a fact; the purity of their practice was conformable to the purity of their faith, and this in a world of a totally different cast, which virtue effectually proved the truth of their religion, by the beneficial effects which flowed from the profession of it. And no wonder, when no other religion in the world ever taught such pure morality, and enforced it by the like powerful motives of an infinitely holy and just God: observing every action, and rewarding or punishing it for ever with an eternity of the greatest happiness or misery, as the moral creature's behaviour should deserve. In this had they such motives as were fitted to produce this virtuous life, and, in justice to Christianity, he ought to have mentioned them; and to be sure, along with these, in this most dangerous and difficult time, they had an extraordinary assistance of the holy spirit of God, to influence their minds, and govern their practice. These things, in justice to Christianity, he ought to have produced, but instead of them, the reader's attention is turned off to two other causes, which could be of little or no benefit to this religion; but the first of them, a considerable prejudice to it, namely, repentance for past sins, and a laudable desire of supporting the society into which they were entered. He here retails the malicious falsehoods which the heathens cast upon the Christians, of alluring into their party the most atrocious criminals; and adds, *These persons who had followed the dictates of benevolence and propriety, derived such a calm satisfaction from the opinion of their own rectitude, as rendered them less susceptible of shame, grief, terror, which have given birth to so many wonderful conversions;* will not hope have some effect upon a generous mind, and must not then the Christian assurance, given to every virtuous person, of an endless life, of inconceivable glory and happiness for ever in it, be more powerful to persuade the good man to the embracing this religion, who had no alteration to make in his practice, and must have

have this self-satisfaction so prodigiously increased, by knowing, that he hereby had acquired the favour of his God, and was certain of his protection and blessing here, and his eternal reward hereafter. Must not these be more likely to work upon a virtuous and generous mind, than to be left totally destitute of them; and be, indeed, more powerful to convert him, than the fear of future punishment could be to any profligate heathens; which punishment they expected not, and were all taught to despise; and who, to become Christians, must change the whole course of their lives, get the better of long and established habits of vice, and ever after live in direct opposition to all their beloved lusts, passions, interests. Has he, indeed, known many of these conversions in a Christian country, where the motives to them are so much more powerful? If he has, his experience is very different from that of all the rest of mankind; and yet, upon this very false supposition, he goes on to vilify and abuse even our Saviour himself.

261, *After the manner of their divine master, the Christian missionaries addressed themselves to men, and especially to women, oppressed by the consciousness, and very often the effects of their vices.* It is impossible that this man should be a believer in Christ, or of any moderation in his infidel principles, who writes in this malevolent manner of the most holy, but compassionate Jesus. For, was it not his custom to preach in their synagogues every sabbath-day, and in all places of the most public resort, at their great festivals, and in their Temple, and to the scribes and pharisees, and Jewish rulers; *so that in secret he did nothing*; and was not this also the practice of the apostles. What is it then which gives a pretence for this infamous scandal? Not to be warm upon such an occasion would be a foolish and criminal apathy. Why Christ had some women to attend him, one of whom had been a great sinner; and he also tells the pharisees, that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance: a severe sarcasm this upon these hypocritical men, who were all abominably wicked, and yet gloried in their outward righteousness; and a dreadful denunciation likewise against all those, who, as men, must be sinners,

ners, and as infidels, almost always the greater sinners ; but who will yet refuse to receive any atonement for sin, or divine assistance against it, and will most insolently stand upon their own strength and rectitude for acceptance and happiness with the all-holy and just governor and judge of the world.

MOST palpably mistaken and unjust is Mr. Gibbons then in this part of his cause of Christianity's progress ; and as to the care of their sect's reputation, this is such a poor motive to virtue, that I should never have thought it worthy of notice, if this gentleman had not made it so. Every sect has this motive, but every sect is not made virtuous by it ; nay, we know ourselves the very reverse to happen. Our infidels, as to number, are nothing, I thank God, in comparison of our Christians, and do they therefore excel in righteousness ? We have also among us many sects of believers, and none of them are remarkable for their superior virtue, and some of them are infamous for a very different character. And if we will believe the primitive Christian writers, it was so in their time ; but as Mr. Gibbons will hardly allow them any credit, I will produce him two, which no Christian can deny, Rev. ii. 6. *But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate,* and 2 Thess. ii. 10. *Whose coming is with all deceivableness of unrighteousness ;* and one that he will not deny, namely, the bad character which these writers give of the Gnosticks, which as these were Christians in name, and the scandal injured the Christians themselves, we may be sure that they would not have so openly confessed, was it a thing to be doubted of, or with truth to be denied. This charge against them Mr. Gibbons himself acknowledges ; but it is here worthy of notice, that he gives from them the same retort upon the church, and hereby contradicts himself, and effectually destroys that very cause of Christianity's growth, which he is here insisting upon.

THE severity of the then Christian morals set forth in so many pages, is a still farther proof of the insufficiency, and even falseness of this his pretended cause. The state of persecution to which the Christians were then continu-

ally liable, and by which they frequently suffered, to the loss of every thing dear to them, and the being afflicted with every thing that is miserable in this life, made it most necessary for them to disengage, as far as it was possible, their affections from this dangerous world; and more especially from the endearments of marriage, which must have proved a most violent temptation, and a dangerous snare to them; so violent, indeed, that St. Paul advises the Christians in these seasons to abstain from marriage; and the many idolatries practised by the heathens upon almost every occasion, rendered it equally requisite that they should keep themselves at a distance from these offices, which would entangle them in this great and justly abominated crime; these, however, were not so many as to render the Christians useless to the common-wealth; for we find many of them employed in many departments of it, which Mr. Gibbons seems to think inconsistent with their religion; but which, notwithstanding all their then strictness, it is certain, that they did not. The first heathen convert to Christianity was, we know, a proselyte to the Jewish religion, who must necessarily abhor and avoid all idolatry, and yet he was a centurion in the Roman army.

270. THE fifth cause of the growth of Christianity, the active government of the church.

HE here attributes a great deal of the safety and aggrandizing of it, to the Christian's ambition of raising themselves to the offices of the church; but the weakness, nay, the injustice of this cause, must appear, when it is considered, that all these offices were for life, and could not be frequently filled; that not one in a thousand could obtain any one of them, nor in ten thousand the highest of them all; that when obtained, they did but subject the possessor to an excess of trouble and danger, danger both of body and soul; and if there be any truth in Christian history, were, till near the close of the third century, much more eagerly shunned than sought for, by the Christian people.

As

As to the church government established by the Apostles, it is nothing to our present purpose; and so I pass on to page 276, where he makes the union of the church one great cause of its growth; but had he given the real case here, he would have set it down, the divisions and contests of the church; and of these, he himself has furnished us with a good many instances. This would have been the just representation of the matter, but to do this would have been to turn the cause directly against his purpose, and therefore the very reverse is asserted by him.

C H A P. IX.

281 **A** COMMUNITY of goods was not adopted by the first Christians in the manner he has stated it. The zeal of some drew them into this practice; but it was not required of any, it was voluntary in them all. St. Peter's words are, *While it remained with thee, was it not thine own, and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?* And yet Mr. Gibbons's words are, The converts were permitted to retain the possession of their patrimony. It was therefore, for the lie, and intended deceit, that Ananias and his wife were struck dead, and thus the scriptures declare it. He might therefore, have spared the following Inuendo, *that in hands, less pure than those of the apostles, it might soon have been corrupted.* Never men shewed such an honest disregard to this world and all its interests, as the apostles did, their great master excepted; and even in this instance, we find them immediately casting away the care of this money from themselves, and putting it into other hands. But a reflection of this kind, would be pleasing to many people, and beget a smile against the apostles, which was an advantage not to be lost.

It may, perhaps, be proper, also, to mention another instance, which may seem to countenance Mr. Gibbons, although not noticed by him. Our Saviour required the young rich man to sell all that he had, and give to the poor, that he might become his disciple, and

have treasure in heaven; but this was then necessary, because his religion was to be for a long time in a most dangerous and persecuted condition, and if the man could not before hand resolve to abandon his possessions, he could not remain a follower of his; but must afterwards apostatize from him, to his greater condemnation and ruin.

THAT the charity of the Christians, in not only relieving their own poor, but many of the heathen besides, and also in saving, and carefully breeding up, many of their children, whom their horrible and brutish ignorance, had exposed to destruction, must have had a very beneficial effect; for the Christian religion cannot be denied. But this belongs to, and ought to have been inserted in his account of the fourth cause, the good lives of the Christians; yet there it is not; and why so? Why it would, in that place, have done honour and service to their religion; it is in this so introduced, as to be made a reproach and detriment to it. And here it ought to be noticed, that the then Christians, who were made so poor by Dr. Middleton, as to be unable to purchase a few copies of a small apology, in defence of their lives, properties, and religion too, are found to be so rich in Mr. Gibbons, as to bribe over the heathens to their party. But I must mention another species of their charity, practised in Cyprian's time, which is not noticed by Mr. Gibbons; that when in a great plague, which raged in Africa and Carthage, and the nearest relations fled from the infected person, and left him to perish for want of assistance, many of the Christians went to, and took care of these people, and saved their lives, though, to be sure, often with the loss of their own.

288, Publick penance. Excommunication was ordered, and practised by St. Paul; and with excommunicated persons the Christians were not so much as to eat. It was the delivering the unhappy person to Satan; who, according to the evil, malicious nature of these apostate spirits, was used, most horribly to torment this poor criminal; till, by his being again restored to Christ, he was delivered from his power, and made happy in the favour
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and protection of his Saviour and his God, and in an assurance of pardon and everlasting happiness in heaven. A demonstration this, of the necessity, truth, benefit, of the Christian religion; and no wonder, then, that an exclusion from it was so excessively dreaded, and so much endured by the penitent to have it taken off. But, certainly, this severity of discipline, was more likely to hinder, than promote a conversion to this faith. It laid these people under a most violent temptation to abandon such a harsh religion as this; and could they have done it, we may be sure, that the heathens would have received them with the greatest cordiality; and they could have nothing to dread from the resentment of their former friends. It cannot be doubted, that the liberal alms of the Christians must have occasioned some conversions among the poor; but that merciful and loving temper, which was enjoined even to our enemies, by this religion, must have made a great many more, and these of the most virtuous and happy dispositions. This is, indeed, an argument, strong in Christianity's favour, and we do accept it from Mr. Gibbons with all thankfulness, whatever his design was in confessing it.

294, WE have in this place, such expressions as only besit a Christian; but it is impossible this author should be such. The whole bent of his soul appears to be set against Christianity, and he sees nothing in it, but with that jaundice eye, which turns every thing to its own blackness and horror. And here he thinks his five causes so powerful, that, instead of being surprized at the rapid progress of Christianity, his wonder is, that it was not still more universal and rapid. Let us, then, more carefully examine this matter; for to me this appears an easiness of belief, superior to that with which these gentlemen are wont to reproach us Christians, and sadly shews, to what an unreasonable length a deep prejudice can carry a bright and penetrating genius. I remember a learned man of these principles to have doubted whether there ever had been such a person as Christ. But something of this kind was necessary to be done, in order to take off, if possible, one of our arguments, thoroughly enforced by Mr. Jenyns, for the truth of Christianity,
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namely, the greatness of its growth, when the cause, and the propagators of it, were naturally so unfit to produce such a wonderful effect.

C H A P. X.

WHEN Christ Jesus was going to die for the salvation of the world, he tells his apostles, that before the destruction of Jerusalem, not then 40 years distant, *this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world*, and St. Paul tells us it was so within 30 years; and from the parable of the leaven, and the grain of mustard-seed, foreshews the 'prodigious encrease of it, strangely, but most surely prophetic, this denunciation, when his religion, and the means to effect it, were both of them of such an unpromising nature. When there was nothing to propagate it, but the preachings of twelve illiterate fishermen, who were equally destitute of learning, address, or eloquence; and who were to wander about the world with this seemingly silly tale in their mouths, that one Jesus, who was by his countrymen, the Jews, put to the most cruel death, for being the vilest of malefactors, was risen from the dead, and become the saviour of the world; that he had commissioned, and sent them out to tell all mankind, that they must believe in him, and the one true God, repent of all their sins, abandon every vice, and practise every virtue; that they must resist and abhor the religions of their several countries in which they had been educated, and to which they were most deeply prejudiced, give up all the goods of this life, and endure every thing miserable in it, even to the most torturous of death, which they must surely expect; and all this, for the sake of this new religion, and the happiness which it promised in a future life. These were the men our Saviour sent out to propagate his religion, and this was the work he had given them to do; and very strange it is, that he should know them so thoroughly, as to think, nay, be sure of it too, that they would meddle in such an undertaking, and, much more, persevere in it; and, stranger still, that these missionaries should be able to convert the most powerful, knowing, and

and polished nation that ever was in the world, convert them from that ancient religion of their's which had all their lusts, prejudices, passions, gratifications, and worldly interests, to attach them to it; which had all the wits of their philosophers, all the learning and power of the world to defend it; to which religion they attributed the growth and prosperity of their mighty empire, and to the abandoning of which by the Christians, they imputed every calamity which befell them since the rise of this religion; and which, therefore, they treated with all that abuse, hatred, persecution, which malice so powerfully urged on could inspire, and which Christ has so justly and particularly foretold to his apostles when he was sending them out.

By these means, and in this manner, and against such an opposition, was christianity to be propagated; and let any man of the least impartiality say, whether it was possible for the apostles to have any success in this work, unless favoured with that high and miraculous interposition of God, which the New Testament gives an account of, and which it is this gentleman's intention to deny, and his endeavour totally to destroy; and along with this, such an inspiration and divine influence of the Holy Ghost, to work upon the minds of the hearers, and give them that ingenuousness of heart which should cause them to attend to, and be convinced by their preaching and miracles. This most important period, upon which all future proceedings of the Christians did entirely depend, is passed over without notice by Mr. Gibbons; and if truth was to be thrown out of the case, and he had nothing more to regard than the success of his understanding, he would have been very wise in this proceeding. For altho' it be certain that he no more believes the miracles of Christ and his apostles, than those of the after christians, yet to have at once condemned the former would have given such disgust to many, would so clearly have shewn the impossibility of the apostles succeeding in this work, and have exposed him to such a certain confutation, that it was not a thing to be undertaken. He would have been disproved by the very existence
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of such a book as the New Testament. He was, therefore, necessitated to take up christianity at a later date, when, from its being very generally propagated and well established in many places, he could, with the greater plausibility, ascribe its wonderful growth to the five causes he has assigned for it. But then, it is to be observed, that as these will not at all relate to the first planting of christianity, they are indeed totally beside his purpose, and prove nothing at all for him. Let us, however, go on to consider them as he has been pleased to state them, and here we shall not find him to succeed, but to be palpably defeated in his attempt, altho' he has, by the most partial calculations, endeavoured to lessen the progress of this religion. That they would, if justly set down, be of considerable effect, is not to be denied; but, as in this light they would have all of them given most convincing proofs of christianity's truth, he has been compelled, in order to avoid this consequence, so to pervert them, as in all of them to lessen, and most of them to annihilate their whole force; and, in some instances, to turn them to the destruction of his own intended proof.

If he had said that christianity, by ascertaining and opening the being and nature of God, and shewing him to be the creator, sustainer, and moral governor of the world, who had a regard to the behaviour of his moral creatures, and would reward or punish them as they should deserve; and by these means merited from all rational creatures, capable of knowing him, such a high homage of adoration, suitable to his holiness, justice, goodness, and infinite power, as made it peculiar to him; and that this religion, by prescribing and making known such a spiritual devotion as was fitting for man to give, and the Divine Being to receive, and by procuring for us sinners, and our imperfect and worthless services, an acceptance from his infinite purity and justice: If he had said that christianity by these means did render itself so exceedingly reasonable, amiable, and beneficial, that it ought to have drawn over every sensible virtuous person to the embracing of it, and more especially so when set in opposition to the impure,

pure, abominable, superstition of the heathens; and in so saying, he would have done no more than justice to our religion, if he had said this, he then indeed, had given a cause which must have been of great force for the promotion of christianity; but as this would have been so convincing an argument of its goodness and truth, he was compelled to evade it; and he has, by making nothing of divine worship, and by blaming the primitive christians for their refusal to give any to the heathen gods, not only destroyed the force of his own cause, but manifestly turned it against himself. For such an unreasonable, obstinate denial in the christians to do what was innocent in his eyes, and meritorious in that of the pagans, could not fail of breeding in the latter, such an hatred to the christians and such a wide separation between them, as must have proved a very great detriment, instead of any advantage to the christian cause. Every one at all acquainted with mankind, knows, that it is not an unreasonable perverse opposition to their wills, but an easy compliance with them as far as we can, which will best gain upon the understanding, and so win over their hearts as to render them most susceptible of conviction.

THE same also is to be observed of his 2d cause. The immortality of the soul, and the retributions of a future life. If he had said, and in justice to christianity he ought to have said, that the nature of God and man was such as to make man deserve and expect a future life of retribution; that christianity did by giving us a certainty of this future life in an infinitely more perfect existence, and for ever enjoying in it an inconceivable degree of glory and happiness; which happiness every man must wish for; and this religion has ensured to every virtuous person upon the reasonable and easy obedience of the gospel, but which had been banished from the heathen world by their absurd notions of this future life and retributions of it, as also by the false reasonings of their philosophers upon this most important subject; if he had said that these christian discoveries contributed to the growth of this religion, he would have offered a cause which had real weight
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in it, and must be most powerful for his purpose; but as a most material proof would have from hence resulted to christianity, he was necessitated to turn off the reader's attention from it, and fix his mind upon other matters; namely, the false expectation of a judgment immediately to come, of an earthly millennium, of the conflagration of Rome and this world, and to an excess of threatening and fear, which the wisest of the heathens all despised, and which must render this cause of very little, if indeed of any effect at all, to the promoting christianity. And to compleat the destruction of it, he ridicules the prophetick language in the scriptures, of the gold and precious stones wherewith the New Jerusalem was to be built; and thus destroys the credit of those writings, which, by his own confession, do alone insure this immortality to us, and thus annihilates his 2d cause.

3d cause, THE miracles of the primitive christians. Had he declared that altho' all miracles had ceased with the lives of the apostles, yet was there so authentick a testimony left of them in the scripture, that there could be no reasonable doubt entertained of them; he then would have given a cause most powerful indeed, for the promotion of christianity. And besides had he farther confessed that there were some remains of the same miraculous powers continued in the church, to the 2d and 3d centuries, to testify for Christ's religion, he would have added force to his cause, and made it demonstrative of its truth, and most powerful for its propagation and encrease. But as this was a thing not to be done by him, he has turned off the whole into an inspiration which is false and ridiculous, said many things subversive of all miracles, and made manifest impostures of all those which the primitive christians asserted of themselves; and he has hereby not only destroyed, but manifestly turned his own cause against himself. For this false pretence to miracles would only have put them upon a level with the heathens, who frequently claimed the same power to their Gods; so that little good could have arisen from this pretence to the christians; but if their imposture had been discovered,

vered, and certainly it must have been so in a heathen government, and with such a majority of the people, and they all so eager against them, it must have torn up christianity by the roots, and entirely extirpated it. They that were such bitter enemies to them as to load their religion and them, with the horrid and unjust calumnies of worshipping an ass's head, killing and devouring children, and using promiscuous copulations, would have blazed this matter abroad to their total subversion. But so palpably different was the matter here, that these miraculous powers which Mr. Gibbons so strenuously denies, were then acknowledged by the heathens themselves, tho' under the name of magick, by which they rendered them not only useless, but even pernicious, to christianity.

4th cause. THE virtue of the primitive christians. We have an odd contrast here, the imposture and villainy of these people were Mr. Gibbons's 3d cause, their integrity and virtue are, in this instance, to constitute his 4th cause. But passing this over, I am to observe, that if he had, as in justice to christianity he ought to have done, set it down that the manifest truth and purity of the christian morality, and the most powerful motives which it held out to virtue, which were infinitely more powerful than the world ever before knew; and these suitably acknowledged by a superior purity and goodness of life in the christians, which must have drawn upon them and their religion, the esteem of every virtuous and sensible person, (and sometimes he finds occasion to speak of christianity in this manner) he then would have produced a cause most justly and highly powerful for christianity's growth. But as a representation of this kind would have been too favourable for this religion, he is forced to suppress it, and to substitute in its place, that excessive severity of life and doctrine, into which these miserable times of persecution had driven the oppressed christians; and has thereby not only annihilated his own cause, but manifestly turned it against himself. For that rigidity and severity of living which was then required of every believer in Christ, must have been very discouraging and greatly obstructed,

frustrated, instead of promoting a conversion to this faith. It is not a very easy matter to persuade a great number of people to embrace such a severe and miserable austerity of life as he has here spoken of.

As to his 5th cause. This, if justly given, would have been of some advantage to christianity; but it is surprising how he could fall into such a palpable mistake, as to make the union of the church any help to its spreading, when there was nothing but dissention, and the most rancorous divisions, among them. The apostolical writings shew us, that this was the case with them even in the first century, whilst the apostles were alive, and miraculous power and divine inspiration were common in the church; (so unwilling are men to give up their own prejudices to any conviction whatsoever) and the christian writers, after them, shew that this was the case with them in the 2d and 3d centuries; but in the 4th, when paganism was brought to its expiring gasp, the controversy between the Trinitarians and the followers of Arius, raised such a flame in the church, and bred such animosities between the contending parties, as made them the derision and sport even of the heathens themselves. These are incontestible facts, and will hereafter be fully proved even by Mr. Gibbons himself; and therefore this most learned writer was strangely mistaken, when he made the union of the church one cause of its prodigious encrease. Let us not, however, at the present, give up this dispute; but for the reader's more perfect satisfaction, let us go on to examine the heads of this cause, as he is pleased to set them down in his book.

THE active government of the church, the primitive freedom and equality, the institutions of bishops and presbyters, and of provincial councils, the progress of the episcopal authority, the metropolitans, the ambition of the Roman pontiff, the distinction of laity and clergy, these are (to stop for a while) made by him, a principal means of christianity's wonderful growth; but how either one or all, of these put together, should have any considerable effect for the conversion of the heathens,

heathens, I see not, nor do I believe, that any impartial considerate person will see. If such a government as this had been peculiar to the christians, it must have proved of some benefit to their religion; but where is the civilized nation that is destitute of it? It is certain, that the Romans were not, and that they had all the advantages which could possibly arise from any of these institutions in the greatest perfection; truly in a much greater perfection than the christians did, or could possibly possess. It is easy to discern that some policy of this kind was absolutely necessary to the existence of christianity; but how this little weak government of the little weak church, without any other support than what conscience could give it, should enable these few religionists not only to resist, but prevail against, that policy, which was so firmly established, and had all the encouragement that law, power, learning, prejudice, wickedness, the most dreadful punishments, and the most ample rewards could give it, I can see nothing of it, altho' I have given it the most careful consideration. Hitherto then his own cause militates against himself: But he also adds, the oblations and revenues of the churches, and the distribution of them, excommunication, publick penance, and the dignity of the episcopal government. To these I answer, That to make excommunication and penance, which were so excessively severe against all apostacy from the faith, or any wickedness in it after its reception, a cause of christianity's growth is strange indeed; he should have set them down as a great obstruction to it. The dignity of the bishops, and the revenues of the churches, were certainly as nothing in comparison of the Roman magistracy, wealth and power; and the very frequent and miserable persecutions by which the christians often suffered, and to which they were continually exposed, must have rendered these advantages of still lesser efficacy to Mr. Gibbons's purpose, must, in fact, have turned them entirely against it. That love of the world, which alone could have given them any force with the christians, must have cast them off from christianity, and made heathens of them all.

UPON the whole of this matter, then, we find this ingenious writer to be very unfortunate in the causes he has assigned for the growth of such a religion as christianity. They are all wrongly stated, they are all ineffectual for his purpose, and in many instances directly turn against it.

C H A P. XI.

THERE are some other reasons after this offered by him, which, it must be confessed, would have been of advantage to this religion if properly stated; namely, the philosophers seeing the folly of heathenism, the incredulity and ridicule of the learned, and of the priests themselves, who officiated in their religious services; and the great scepticism which these things produced among many of their people. It is certain that there is strength in these causes, and that in such a state of things they must have been very considerable helps to christianity; so considerable indeed that they seem to have affected Mr. Gibbons himself, and for a while to have made a convert of him; his words are, *Some deities of a more fashionable cast, might have occupied the deserted temples of Jupiter and Apollo, if, in the decisive moment, the wisdom of providence had not interposed a genuine revelation fitted to inspire the most rational esteem and conviction, whilst at the same time it was adorned with all that could attract the curiosity, the wonder, the veneration, of the people.*

How to reconcile this to the whole tenour of his book, and many of his direct expressions, I know not. Must not both Christ and his apostles have been, according to him, a set of the most profligate deceivers? And are these the people who brought down this genuine and amiable revelation from heaven? This is strange indeed. Nor can I see how he can reconcile this to the character of his most highly esteemed and commended historian Tacitus, who, in his own translation, uses these words of the Christians and their religion, *Branded with deserved infamy, a dire superstition, was even introduced to Rome*

Rome itself, which receives and protects whatever is atrocious; they were all convicted, not so much for the crime of setting fire to the city, as for their hatred of mankind. In which words, besides the manifest and spiteful falsity of them, and the direct contradiction given to Mr. Gibbons himself, in the above cited passage, it might easily be shewn, were it worth insisting upon, that he has made his translation worse than the original, in order to throw an odium upon Christianity. And as to its being fitted to attract the curiosity, wonder, and veneration of the people, this will not, I suppose, be accounted a reproach to it; and how, indeed, could it be otherwise, when it was to open to us the nature of the one infinite being, and the most stupendous of all his wonderful providences; providences, which the angels desire to look into, and which were to be the most expressive of, and honourable to his infinite nature, that he would ever shew for the good of his creatures.

*BUT it is proper that we should enquire into these particulars, which have given him such a high notion of the easiness of Christianity's success. They are set down, page 293: The fashion of incredulity was communicated from the philosopher to the man of pleasure or business, from the noble to the plebeian, from the master to the menial slave who waited at his table, and who eagerly listened to the freedom of his conversation. On public occasions the philosophical part of mankind affected to treat with decency and respect, the religious institutions of their countries; but their secret contempt, penetrated through the thin and awkward disguise; and even the people, when they discovered that their deities were rejected and derided by those whose rank and understanding they were accustomed to reverence, were filled with doubts and apprehensions concerning the truth of these doctrines, to which they had yielded a most implicit belief. The decline of ancient prejudice left a very numerous portion of mankind in a painful and comfortless situation. A state of scepticism and suspense may amuse a few inquisitive minds. But the practice of superstition is so congenial to the multitude, that if they are forcibly awakened, they will regret the loss of their pleasing vision. Their love of the marvellous and supernatural, their curiosity with regard to future events, and their strange propensity to extend their hopes and
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their fears beyond the limits of this world, were the principal causes which favoured the establishment of polytheism. So urgent on the vulgar is the necessity of believing, that the fall of any system of mythology will most probably be succeeded by the introduction of some other mode of superstition ; and so he goes on in the words already quoted, to wonder that the progress of Christianity, was not, in these circumstances, still more rapid and universal : we must, then, examine this matter, as laid down by him.

MR. Gibbons dates this scepticism, from the rise of Christianity, to the extinction of heathenism ; but, upon enquiry, we shall not find this assertion verified, but falsified by stubborn facts. The philosophers, indeed, denied, all futurity, and derided the heathen notion of the retributions there ; but we do not find them in any readiness, nor the people either, to give up their old religion ; but, on the contrary, tenacious, persevering, obstinate, in the defence of it ; and doing all that power, malice, falsehood, genius, learning, could do for the support of it. Thus we have seen it to be with his favourite historian Tacitus, and this is abundantly proved by Christianity's not being able to prevail for these hundred years together, and till heathen Rome had become christian, by the empire of Constantine the Great ; it is, besides, proved, by the many and cruel persecutions inflicted upon the Christians during this time ; by the cries of the people, upon every occasion, to have the Christians given to the lions ; and by the defence acknowledged by Mr. Gibbons, to be made for heathenism, by the philosophers of the 2d and 3d centuries. He is, therefore, most shamefully mistaken in that state of the case, which he has given, and upon which he hath so confidently founded Christianity's success. And if any one has a mind to see this fact undoubtedly confirmed, I refer him to vol. 1, chap. 16, of the late Dr. Leland's advantages and necessity of the Christian revelation ; and he will there receive an entire satisfaction on this point. Only, as this truly learned and great man hath not mentioned Plutarch among his heathen authorities, I will observe, that this philosopher, in accounting for the cessation of oracles among the heathens, by the supposed death

death of the dæmons who gave them, and who, though very long lived, might not be immortal; and, by his endeavouring to explain a way, and account for, the monstrous idolatry of the Egyptians, he gives me a strong suspicion that he knew of christianity, and took these methods to preserve that most absurd and bloody superstition from being destroyed by the reasonableness, purity, and truth, of the Christian religion. And, I must, also, for the same purpose, mention that great genius, and learned philosopher Longinus, who shews himself to be well acquainted, both with Judaism and Christianity; and yet, what concern does he express at Homer's battle of the heathen gods? And what care does he take to hinder it from hurting their religion?

It is true, that there was a Lucian in the second century, who did most severely ridicule the heathen superstition; but then, he did so to Christianity, as well as to that, and, indeed, to all religion along with them; and is, therefore, nothing to Mr. Gibbons's purpose. And, it is also true, that Seneca, in the first century, spoke very harshly of their worship, but then it is equally true, that he advises all the people to conform to it. But although erroneous in this his state of the case, Mr. Gibbons is not so, as to the consequences which must follow from such a freedom of conversation; and, much more, from such an infidel freedom of writing as he has assumed.

It is his opinion, and certainly, the truth, that the people will have some religion or other. Man's nature requires it, and this natural inclination, as well as the reason of the thing, is a demonstration, that it is natural to man, and ought to be received by every one of this nature; and must be, and will be so, if he be not debased to the lowest degree of wickedness and wrong judging. And now, from his own mouth, I beseech him, to consider what he has been doing, in this his attempt to destroy Christianity; and whether the world will owe him any thanks for it, even if there was not to be a future life after the present, or any retribution in it. Can he find any other religion upon earth so good for us, as that of Christ, which he has but just now justly described, a genuine

nuine revelation, fitted to inspire the most rational esteem and conviction? Can he find any so good as this? And that as it is taught in his own national church, for the reasonableness, purity, and usefulness of its precepts, and for its most powerful enforcements of virtue, and can he avoid seeing the dreadful consequences which must follow from its being destroyed? For which he has, however, so heartily laboured, and which will not be without its effect; I pray God, that it may be but a little, upon a now luxurious, careless, and very profligate people; possibly he may need to be told, but the reader certainly ought to be told, the dreadful consequences of it.

THESE writings of his will propagate scepticism and infidelity, by a great deal already too rife among us, these a total disrelish to, and breach of every virtue, these a hatred of all the sanctions, which enforce virtue and restrain from vice, these the keenest hatred of the gospel, and every thing enjoined by it, and these an increase, an inundation of wickedness, till it produces a total disregard to the welfare of the state, great mischief to it, and to all the individuals of it, and till it shall at last throw it into slavery, and all the absurdities, superstition, and idolatry of the church of Rome, from which we have, by our reformation, been so long, and so happily emancipated. For then the baseness of the people's minds will make them require the iron hand of arbitrary power to controul their perniciousness, will render their remains of liberty but a curse to them, and them, therefore, not only unwilling to defend, but eager to give it up; and this baseness will make their minds so connatural to the baseness and superstition of popery, that they will be ready to abandon their own true and holy belief, and eager to accept of the outward services, the conjurations, and the absolutions of the church of Rome. And thus, shall our true and spiritual religion, the boast of Christianity, and our free, and happy constitution, the admiration and envy of every sensible and virtuous man, be totally destroyed from among us; and this, not only by the just judgment of an offended God, but by the natural effects of the things themselves. An event so certain to follow from the increase of infidelity, that he must
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either wish for it, or be judicially blinded, who does not discern it, and from hence see the encreasing danger of our countries at this time.

MR. GIBBONS ought, therefore, out of love to the truth, to the welfare of mankind, and the good of his own country, to have struck out these parts of his book which are so hurtful to christianity. Dr. Watson, in my opinion, yields a great deal too much to our deists, when he allows that the usefulness and benefits of christianity, are no sure evidence of the truth of this religion. For as the divine being is infinitely good, and this his goodness was the cause of all creation, so can it never be that the thing which is absolutely and entirely good, can be false; it must proceed from him who is entire goodness and truth. And altho' we may, in other instances, be easily mistaken, yet not so in this of christianity; it is so highly necessary to our happiness, both here and hereafter, indeed, absolutely so, and so perfective of our nature, and surely productive of happiness, both in this and in the other world, that it must be true.

C H A P. XII.

294, **I**T is said that the conquests of Rome, paved the way for the conquests of christianity; the assertion is true, and most highly honourable to this religion, because, as Rome civilized, and made its people thoughtful and knowing, it shewed that christianity was of such a nature, as to prevail most where the people are most fitted to reason, to enquire, and to understand. And for want of this thing among the savages of America, our religion, to this hour, has not been able to make any considerable progress among them.

THAT the Jews were so incredulous to the miracles of the divine prophet, as to render it unnecessary to publish any Hebrew gospel, is a great mistake; but shews plainly what this gentleman thinks, and would have his readers think, of the miracles of Christ and his apostles.

apostles. Acts ii. 41. we find 3000 converted by one preaching and the miracle preceding it ; Acts iv. 5000 converted by another preaching. Acts v. 14. It is, and believers were the more added to the lord, multitudes both of men and women. Acts vi. 7. It is, And the word of God encreased, and the number of disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and the great company of the priests were obedient unto the faith. And Acts xxi. 20. James, who then presided over and governed the church of Jerusalem, declares, thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are who believe, the original is myriads or ten thousands. It is then a mistake in this learned man, to make the Jews so incredulous to the christian miracles ; and he must consequently be mistaken in the reason he has assigned for there never having been a Hebrew gospel ; which, altho' the thing be doubtful, I do not believe there really ever was. The cause of this is, however easily discerned ; there was one or more of the apostles always residing at Jerusalem, (to which the necessity of a Hebrew gospel was entirely confined) till they were all killed, or had fled from it at the approach of that Roman war which destroyed Jerusalem and their temple and publick worship, and all their legal rites ; and from his mouth, and the teachers authorized by him, the Jews must have had such a full information of every thing in christianity, as rendered it unnecessary for them to have any gospel in writing. And here I must observe, that as the Jewish teachers then did, as the church of Rome now does, assume to themselves an infallibility in interpreting their scriptures, and had, in fact, to make good this claim, texts by a great many, more numerous and forcible than Rome can produce for herself ; and that these rulers did almost all of them, in their conjunct body, all of them deny and reject Christ ; and their people were so long used to allow them this high prerogative ; considering these things, it is really wonderful how christianity could make any progress at all among them ; and fully shews, that the miracles wrought for confirmation of it, must have been stupendous and convincing indeed. It is observed by Dr. Middleton's antagonists, that, according to his own introduction,

duction, he ought to have began his enquiry with an examination of the miracles of the first century, as set forth in the New Testament, and have shewn why and when the power of working them ceased from the church ; but instead of this fair proceeding, he begins his enquiry with those of the fourth century, when the necessity of them was nearly superceded ; when the morals of the christians were exceedingly corrupted by the outward peace and prosperity of the church, and more especially by the animosities and violent contentions raised by the Arians against the Trinitarians, which made some of each side ready to forge miracles for the support of their different tenets ; and the willing and credulous people too ready to receive them ; when too, their love of monkery and the saints and their rotten reliëts, greatly hurt the purity of their faith, even in this century ; but in the next threw them into down right superstition and idolatry. This is the time in which Dr. Middleton chose to begin his enquiry, and afterwards to ascend to the third and second century, and in this has he been very nearly followed by Mr. Gibbons. The miracles of the third and second centuries, are first condemned by the latter, and when he has brought those into contempt, the miracles of Christ and his apostles are likewise attacked by him ; and altho' in a covert, yet in a most effectual manner. To have professedly began with those of Christ and his immediate followers, was a too dangerous and offensive enterprize. It was therefore his most successful method, at first, to contest these of a latter time, which could not be so certainly proved, and would not give so great an offence ; and then as soon as the reader's mind was sufficiently prejudiced, he might deny them all in general, and this condemnation would be the more easily swallowed, and any hints taken which might destroy the belief of them.

I do not say this was the real design of Mr. Gibbons, but I must affirm that this proceeding was so well fitted to produce these effects, that he who would defend the truth, ought not to let it pass without notice. Self-deceit is the easiest of all others, and where there

is any prejudice in the mind, it is the most difficult to be avoided ; and if ever man was prejudiced against any thing Mr. Gibbons is, and most deeply so, against christianity ; for he sees nothing belonging to it in a just, but distorted light, and this has drawn him here into palpable self-contradiction. He repeatedly allows a strong internal evidence to be in christianity, and yet in this place he effectually destroys it. He will not allow the primitive christian writers to have offered any reason for their religion, which was fitted to move a sensible man, and yet their principal defence of it was, the strong internal evidence with which it abounded. They not only expose the absurdity, falsehood, wickedness, of heathenism ; but they dwell, and chiefly too, upon the infinite benefit which scripture instruction has done to the world, in opening and ascertaining to us the being and nature of God, his creation of the world, his moral government and providence over it, the pure worship by which he is to be served, his observance of, and regard to the moral behaviour of every man, and his having appointed a day in which he will judge the whole world in righteousness, and reward or punish every man with an eternity of the greatest happiness or misery, according to his good or evil behaviour in this life ; by his giving us a perfect rule of duty, which forbids even the least vice, and enjoys the most perfect virtue and purity of life ; purity not only in our outward words and actions, but inwardly in our most secret thoughts and inclinations, and all this as we will hope to escape this most horrid and threatened misery, and obtain this promised and most glorious happiness. And is there indeed nothing which can convince in all these things, and this too when they are set in opposition to the monstrous corruptions and errors of heathenism ? Mr. Gibbons does in effect, here affirm, that there is not ; but in this he equally contradicts reason and his own previous declaration. And here it must be observed, that as he makes nothing at all of prophecy, utterly denies all miracles, and in this place destroys all internal evidence of christianity, that he does indeed hereby effectually render it as he here would have it, unworthy the reception of any sensible man ;

man; but then we have seen this to be a mistake in every one of these instances, and even a contradiction to himself.

As to the proportion of the christians to that of the heathens, it is of but small consequence, and therefore I pass it over, and proceed to page 306, where it is said that, *The new sect of christians was almost entirely composed of the dregs of the populace, of boys, women, beggars, slaves, by the last of which the missionaries might sometimes be introduced into the rich and noble families to which they belonged, and who mingled with, and insinuated themselves into the minds of the illiterate croud, whilst they cautiously avoided the dangerous encounter of the philosophers*; and this picture, altho' confessed to be an enemy's exaggeration, is yet declared not to be void of a faint resemblance. That the majority of every religion must be made up of the populace, is unquestionable; but that the christians were not entirely composed of them; but had many of station, learning, among them, is certain from Pliny's letter to Trojan, as well as from all the christian apologists. Had it, however, been as it is here represented, are we to be governed by the fashion of the world, or the reasonableness of the thing? And can Mr. Gibbons think that the writing in this manner, will do honour either to himself or to his cause? And as to their avoiding to encounter with the heathen philosophers, what can the man intend by such an expression? Were not many of the then christians philosophers, and men of deep learning; and were they not spoke to, and converted by the christians? And is heathenism, indeed, the religion which they professed, and endeavoured to defend, to be in reason preferred before christianity? and is the latter found to be unable to defend itself to rational and knowing people? It cannot be affirmed, the very reverse is but now asserted by Mr. Gibbons himself; and he must know that the most learned and worthy men of our nation, men who have done the highest honour to it by their genius, knowledge, virtue, have been staunch believers; and of how different a character from these the heads of our unbelievers have been, the world need not be told from me.

308, It is a most certain fact, that almost all heresies have arisen in the church of Christ from men's giving too much deference to their own weak reason, and too little to the revelation of an all-knowing and infinite God; and never was any fault more rife in the world, than this at the present is among our people.

309, It is acknowledged, but with restrictions, that there were many of rank and learning at that time professing christianity, tho' these too few to take off entirely the imputation of ignorance and obscurity; but this he allows, does after all give us the more reason to admire their merit and success. He also says, that while christianity promises a heaven to the poor in spirit, and the afflicted cheerfully listen to it, the fortunate are satisfied with the happiness of this world. That they are ever endeavouring to make themselves so, is allowed; but that they are able to accomplish their purpose, I absolutely deny; and the continued, various, and ruinous pursuits of those who are highest in the world, confirms this to be the truth as well as the confessions at last made by themselves, and the great Solomon among the rest. And, indeed, the clearest reasons, as well as the constant experience of all mankind, shews us it ever must be so.

MAN can never be gratified by the pleasures of sense, because sense is but one, and the lowest part of him. His highest faculties are those of reason and morality, and from them must man's chief happiness ever arise; but of these two, he has such an imperfect use in this world, that they can never fill or satisfy that appetite; and to aggravate his misfortune, the man is ever found to sacrifice the pleasures of these to the lower and baser pleasures of sense. Besides, Mr. Gibbons allows that man is made for a future life; and if he be, what shall we say to the folly and baseness of him, who in contradiction to this most exalted prerogative, the end of his own nature, and the intention of his most beneficent creator, shall endeavour to pin himself down, and give up all his affection and care to this insignificant world, and this to the total neglect of that infinitely important
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futurity, which must prove his certain and everlasting destruction in it. Is it any reproach to christianity, that men of this kind are not to be gained over to it?

310, *The great philosophers, by their language or silence, equally discover their contempt for the growing sect of Christianity, who could not produce a single argument, to engage the attention of men of sense and learning.* What has Mr. Gibbons, indeed, found our religion, which they all open, deserving of such a censure as this? Has not he, himself, made the purity and power of its precepts, one great cause of its success, and is not this, too, that genuine divine revelation, which, in his own words, deserves all esteem and veneration; and, has he not, but now, confessed, that there were some men of sense and learning among the Christians? And how, then, can he talk with such condemnation of them, and praise of those philosophers, who, in opposition to this religion, persevered in, and defended, such a one as their paganism was?

VERY deep, indeed, must this gentleman's prejudice be, when it could hinder him from seeing, that he must expose himself by such an attack. For, when we have the gospel and its proofs before us, it is of no consequence to us, what others have thought of these matters. Will Mr. Gibbons, indeed, set up authority above reason and truth? But, that the reader may, in some measure, know, what these philosophers were, upon whose behaviour, Mr. Gibbons, in this place, lays such an extraordinary stress, when he so severely condemns the Christian writers, I shall, shortly, but with the greatest integrity and justice, shew, what these men principally were. Till Christianity had made a considerable progress, they generally rejected a future life, but all of them, any retribution in it. Their religion was only so far to obtain the goods of this world, and had nothing in it of morality or virtue, but abundance of immorality and wickedness. The end of man, and his chief happiness, was totally mistaken by them all; and, besides a most unreasonable attachment to their several, and contradictory sects, which they thought themselves bound to follow and maintain, the principles of almost all of them, were founded
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upon dogmas, not only unfavourable, but most adverse to christianity, and true religion; and we know, that every one of them allowed of several vices, which the truth, with all true religion, abhors and rejects. I need not open this matter, Mr. Gibbons must be sensible of it, I will only hint at a few particulars.

PLATO, in his republic, recommends a community of wives, and would have the men, who had done most service to the public, to have a greater liberty allowed in this way. Socrates himself, was infamous for that vice, which drew down fire from heaven upon Sodom and Gomorrah; and the philosophers were so commonly addicted to it, that no man, who had a regard to the purity of his son, dared to commit him to their tuition. How just, then, is the character given of them by St. Paul, Rom. first chap. that, pretending to be wise, they became fools, and abandoned themselves to the most shameful and abominable vices, and it was a known matter among themselves, that their practice, and their reasoning about virtue, were of a totally different cast. And are these the men, upon whose opinion we are to reject Christianity? Reject the purest religion which the world ever saw, and throw ourselves back, it may be, into heathenism, with all its abominations; destroy the most perfect system of morality, take away all incitements to virtue, and discouragement from vice; leave no hope of futurity, or, if there should be such, no possibility of our being happy in it! Are these the men, upon whose virtue and integrity we are so entirely to depend, as, upon their account, to do ourselves all these destructive and irreparable mischiefs.

BESIDES, I am to observe, that these men could relish nothing but reason, the very pride of silly reason, and that it was one main end of the gospel to destroy this very foolish and criminal presumption, when applied to religion. It was, (besides the teaching us such a purity of life, as might fit us for the happiness of heaven) to open the one infinite nature to man, and to do the highest honour to it; and therefore consisted, not of a revelation, which could be reasoned out by man, or any creature,

ture, but which only could be made known by the creator himself, and proved by the exertion of his own almighty power, that is, by controuling that course of nature which he has established, and which could only be altered by his own hand; as, also, by his predicting some hundreds, I might have said thousands of years, before the completion, many contingent events, which should, in their due time, come to pass, and be fulfilled. A knowledge, this, which no creature could have, and which, some of our reasoners will not allow to be possible, even to God himself. This revelation was to be the power of God, and the wisdom of God; that is, these attributes exerted to the highest degree; and it was to be thus, with regard to a whole world, and the whole universe, and the government of them all, so as would be best for their happiness; and this, from their creation, to the consummation of all things; and must, therefore, be as high above man or angel, as the heavens are above, and higher than the earth. No wonder, then, that it should be despised by these self-opinionated men, who confined all reason to themselves, and never had any proper thought about these matters. It neither came, nor was proved, in the way that they wished; and, therefore, was it foolishness to them. But, St. Paul's assertion will ever remain true, that the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and so it has remarkably proved in this instance. As to the understanding and knowledge of the primitive Christian writers, let their works, still extant, speak for them. The general opinion of the world has hitherto been most highly in their favour, and whoever will read them with any impartiality, will, I believe, think of them in the same manner.

310, Mr. Gibbons doubts, whether the philosophers perused the Christians-apologies for themselves and their religion. This may, possibly, be truth; but should not be said by any man that had a regard to their character; for, what reasoners, or regards of religion must they be, who could be so satisfied with heathenism, that they would not even hear any thing that could be said in opposition to it. *He laments, also, that the Christian cause was not defended*

defended by abler advocates; they expose, with superfluous wit and eloquence, the extravagance of polytheism, and interest our compassion, by displaying the suffering and innocence of their injured brethren. But how was this superfluous, when these philosophers still persevered in the defence of this religion, and the people still went on in the cruel persecution of the Christians?

But they insist much more on the predictions which announced than on the miracles which accompanied the appearance of the Messiah. We ought, at this great distance of time, to be very cautious how we condemn the method of defence made use of by the primitive Christians. We have Origen's book against Celsus, who, in regard to his own reputation, to his religion, and to the authority by which he is so often controuled, and hindered from running into allegory, we may be sure has given us a just state of this philosopher's controversy; and, now, I ask Mr. Gibbons, who has certainly read this work, whether he thinks Celsus's arguments strong or well chosen? I will answer for him, that he does not. And yet, the Christians, if they would at all reply, must answer such reasonings as these. They, who had been bred up heathens themselves, and lived among them, and were intimately acquainted with their religion and philosophy, must be much better judges, than any of us can be, what the best methods were, with which to defend themselves, and to persuade the others; and it might have been folly in them, to apply to such as may now seem to us, most fitting and powerful for their purpose. In this instance, however, we can effectually vindicate them.

THESE philosophers had the scriptures before them, which contained an authentick account of many, and most stupendous miracles, having been wrought by Christ and his Apostles, which account, it appears, that the heathens themselves did not contradict; and, if these could not convince them, how much less the fewer and lesser that were performed in the church after them. But as all these were, by the heathens, attributed to magick, and their own gods were presumed to perform the like
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feats, it was manifestly improper for the Christians, to rest their principal defence upon a proof of this kind. There was, however, one of them, which was proper, and this, I find, insisted upon by Athenagoras, Theophilus, Tertullian, Minutius, Fealix, Cyprian, Origen, and, probably, by many others, if I was to look into them; and this is the power, which Tertullian so strongly insisted upon, of the Christians making the dæmons confess whom the heathens worshipped, that they were dæmons, and not gods. And this very reason is given by Origen, in his defence of Christianity. He affirms, that some remarkable footsteps of this miraculous power, with which to confirm Christianity, did remain to his days, that the church was appointed to destroy the power of infernal dæmons; that it was absurd to suppose the apostles did no miracles at all, but relied on the doctrine only, and there were some remnant of this power to dispossess dæmons, still preserved among them. If he should relate miracles of his own knowledge, it would furnish the infidels with a subject of laughter, who would be ready to suspect the Christians, as the Christians did them, of inventing fictions to support a bad cause; but he calls God to witness, that in him, it was only by a proper evidence, to maintain Christianity's divine original. Thus speaks the great Origen.

BUT prophecies were of a much more convincing nature to the heathens. The particulars of our Saviour's life and actions are strongly insisted upon by them; and the prediction's exact completion, by the event, so many hundred of years after the prophecy had been given, was so full a proof for Christianity, as left no way to evade it, but a denial of the book's antiquity, which, as taken from Christ's greatest enemies, the Jews, could not be done, without a most manifest absurdity; yet, even this absurdity, great as it was, we find some of them driven to affirming the prophecies to be wrote after the facts were done.

WHAT the books of Orpheus, Hermes, and the Sibylls were, I know not, nor he either; but that the latter,

latter, which only is here of importance, was not a Christian forgery, is unquestionably certain; because they are quoted by Virgil, and for a material part of Christ's character, some years before he was born; and Athenagoras shews, that Plato cited them more than 300 years before Christ to prove their gods to be deified men. The learned Prideaux has a long dissertation upon this matter, and concludes, not that they were Christian forgeries, but that there were some interpolations made in them by the Christians, which was very foolishly done by them, for they thereby rendered these books useless to the cause they were intended to support. But even this cannot be allowed to that very learned and honest man, whose desire of impartiality, has, in this instance, carried him a great deal too far.

THERE were too many of the Sibylline books, and in too many hands to have been all corrupted by the Christians; nor was it possible, when the heathens had all power in their hands, for the Christians to quote these interpolations, without being confuted and exposed by their enemies, and this to the ruin of their religion. And that the reader may have entire satisfaction in this matter, I will here subjoin Mr. Reeves's note upon it, in his translation of Justin Martyr's first apology.

THE great objection against the Sibylline oracles, is, that they so plainly and expressly foretel Christ to the heathen world, as plainly, or more so, than the prophets to the Jews; but was not Christ as manifestly foretold by Balaam the Aramitick Sorcerer, as by the prophet Isaiah? Did not Job, who was not of Israel, speak of the great article of the resurrection? Did not Daniel, in his captivity, communicate his prophecies to the Gentiles, as well as the Jews? And was not a prophet sent to Jeroboam, an Israelite, indeed, by birth, but a pagan by religion. All which plainly prove that God never delivered himself more plainly by his prophets, than when he transacted with the Gentiles, and not with the Jews. And this likewise proves what Clemens Alexandrinus tells us, 6 Stro. p. 270, That, as God raised up prophets

phets among the Jews, to bring them to salvation, “ Sic & selectissimum quemque a paganis servare voluisse, prophetas ipsis proprios propria ipsorum dialecto excitando;” and to these, Sibylls, Justin, Martyr, Clemens, Origen, Eusebius, Lactantius, send the heathens for the truth of Christianity, and laid so great a stress upon them that they were called Sibyllists. But now, had all these been forgeries, (not to mention the baseness of a pious fraud abominated by the first Christians) they never would have been so fillily impudent, as to have appealed to them before the Emperors, and before the world. And Origen never could have challenged Celsus, or any of the heathens to give a considerable instance where these books were interpolated by the Christians, which, no doubt, they would have triumphantly done, had they any such interpolation to produce. Moreover, it is certain, that in Cicero’s time, the Sibylline prophecies were so interpreted by some, in favour of Cæsar, as predicted a monarchy. Divi. Li. 2. Eum quemque revera Regem, &c. That if we would be safe, we should acknowledge him for a king who really was so, which interpretation, Cicero, after Cæsar’s death, was so much offended with, that he quarrels with the oracles and their interpreters, quam obrem Sibyllam quidem sepositam, &c. wherefore, let us shut up the Sibyll, and keep her close, that, according to the decree of our ancestors, her verses may not be read, without the express command of the senate. And then adds, cum Antistibus, &c. Let us also deal with the quindecimber, and the interpreters of these Sibylline books, that they would rather produce any thing out of them than a king. And in the eclogue of Virgil, Ultima Cume venit, &c. written about the beginning of Herod the Great’s reign, and flatteringly applied to Pollia’s Son, Salonus, he speaks of such a golden age, and renovation of all things, as cannot be fulfilled in the reign of any earthly king, and in a strain prophetick. The same year that Pompey took Jerusalem, one of the Sibyll oracles made a mighty noise, that nature was about to bring forth a king to the Romans. And Suetonius, in the life of Augustus, saith, that this so terrified the senate, that they

they made a decree, that none born that year should be educated, and that those, whose wives were with child, applied the prophesy to themselves. And Appian, Plutarch, Salust, Cicero, all say, that it was this prophesy of the Sibylls, which stirred up Cornelius Lentulus, at that time, he hoping that he was the man designed for the king of the Romans. The words of Suetonius in the life of Vespasian, are very remarkable, "*percrebuerat Oriente toto vetus & constans opinio esse in Fois ut eo tempore Judea profecti rerum potirentur.*" And to the same purpose those of Tacitus. His li. 5. "*Pluribus persuasio ineret Antiquis Sacerdotum libris contineri eo ipso tempore fore ut valuerat oriens, profectique Judea rerum potirentur.*"

Now what I look upon as the most probable account of these express prophecies concerning Christ, I mean how they came to be so rise among the heathens, is this: The Jews, in all their dispersions, took all occasions to speak the most magnificent things of their expected Messiah; and these prophecies, by the more than ordinary grace of God, shone brighter and clearer upon their minds during their captivity, as the great support to them under their exile; and that the Jewish oracles came to be admitted into the Sibylline books laid up in the capital, was I believe upon this occasion. The books of the Sibylls were of two kinds; those bought by Tarquin, and burnt with the capital in the time of Sylla, and those we find from Livy, were full of nothing but idolatry and superstition. But after the re-building of the capital, there were others brought from Erythræ, by the three ambassadors deputed for that purpose; and afterwards upon the same design, were others sent by Augustus as Tacitus tells Ann c. 6. "*Quæsitus Samo Illo Erythris per Africam etiam & Scitiliam & Italicus colonias Carminibus Sibyllæ, datum Sacerdotibus negotium, quantum humano ope potuissent vera discernere.*" And to the same purpose Suetonius Aug. cap 31. Now who can doubt but in this search after the Sibylline oracles, many of the Jewish prophecies were picked up (especially those famous ones concerning

cerning their new king) and carried with the rest to Rome: For, after the first were burnt with the capitol, who could possibly distinguish the one from the other? And therefore Tacitus cautiously adds in the fore-cited passage “*quantum humana ope potuissent.*”

THUS argues the learned Mr. Reeves; and now, dean Prideaux's mistake, and Mr. Gibbons's too great readiness to abuse the christians, must be manifest to every reader.

THE inattention asserted of the heathens, to the miracles of Christ and his apostles, is founded upon a great mistake. All the miracles of our Saviour were performed among the Jews, a very few excepted, in the adjoining heathen nations; and what were done among them by the apostles, we know not, except a small number performed by St. Paul to confirm his preaching. Neither Seneca nor Pliny might ever have seen one of them, nor is it probable that they did. To people prejudiced beyond conviction, they were never shewn; because that all-wise being who was to work them, knew before-hand when they would be useless; or these very people might have seen and neglected them, or not have chosen to speak any thing of them; and unless they had been converted by them, it is certain that they would not. We are now too well acquainted with the character of these philosophers, to expect such a self-denying fairness and candour from any of them. The spiteful misrepresentations which they give of christianity, when they at all speak of it, are a full confirmation of this. But the defenders of the primitive christian miracles, against Dr. Middleton, have shewn that there was not that dead silence of the heathens about them neither, which Mr. Gibbons asserts. They are often brought in only by them to be ridiculed and abused as magick.

THE darkness of our Saviour's crucifixion might have been confined to the land of Judea, and it is now generally thought to have been so. But that Phlegan's
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testimony is by us wisely given up, I know not ; Dr. Chapman's dissertation upon this subject, at least, shews the probability to be on the other side. And from Origen's quoting it, it is plain to be of a very ancient standing. The answer given in Dr. Watson's book, to the representation here made of Pliny, shews it to be a great mistake.

As to chapter the 16th of Mr. Gibbons, it contains matter of so much less importance to christianity, and what is offensive in it, is so particularly confuted by much abler pens than mine, that I shall say nothing to it. But here I will congratulate my christian reader, upon the certainty and strength of his holy faith ; for very certain and well-founded must it indeed be, when it could withstand, and without any, the least, injury to itself, the fiercest attacks that all the genius and learning, all the deep prejudices and eagerness, of Mr. Gibbons, could contrive with which to destroy it. But it is truly founded upon a rock, and will remain unshaken among us so long as we shall retain any just sense of the dignity of rational and moral man, above that of the irrational and immoral brute ; and are capable of any prosperity in this world, or happiness in that which is to come.

AND now I might conclude, but that I think it first necessary to warn the christian reader against being frightened from his religion, by the horrid picture which he will hereafter find to be drawn by Mr. Gibbons, and justly too, in his history of the next, and the two following centuries, when the furious dissensions, animosities, persecutions, and cruelty of the christians against each other ; and when the luxury, pride, ambition, turbulence, of their great and powerful clergy, will present a horrid scene to his view ; very dishonourable, indeed to the actors themselves, but not really hurtful to their religion ; for, both by its most positive precepts, and by the whole tenor of its doctrine, it is the farthest removed from, it is the most adverse to this abominable destructive spirit. But as long as men are men, and Satan is permitted to range abroad
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in the world, there will be such things in it ; and especially about that which, of all others, deserves the greatest esteem, and is most worthy to be preserved, and contended for, christianity.

PHIL. v. 12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness, (margin, wicked spirits) in high places.

T H E E N D.